NOTHING PERSONAL, BUT IS GREENSPAN IMPOTENT?

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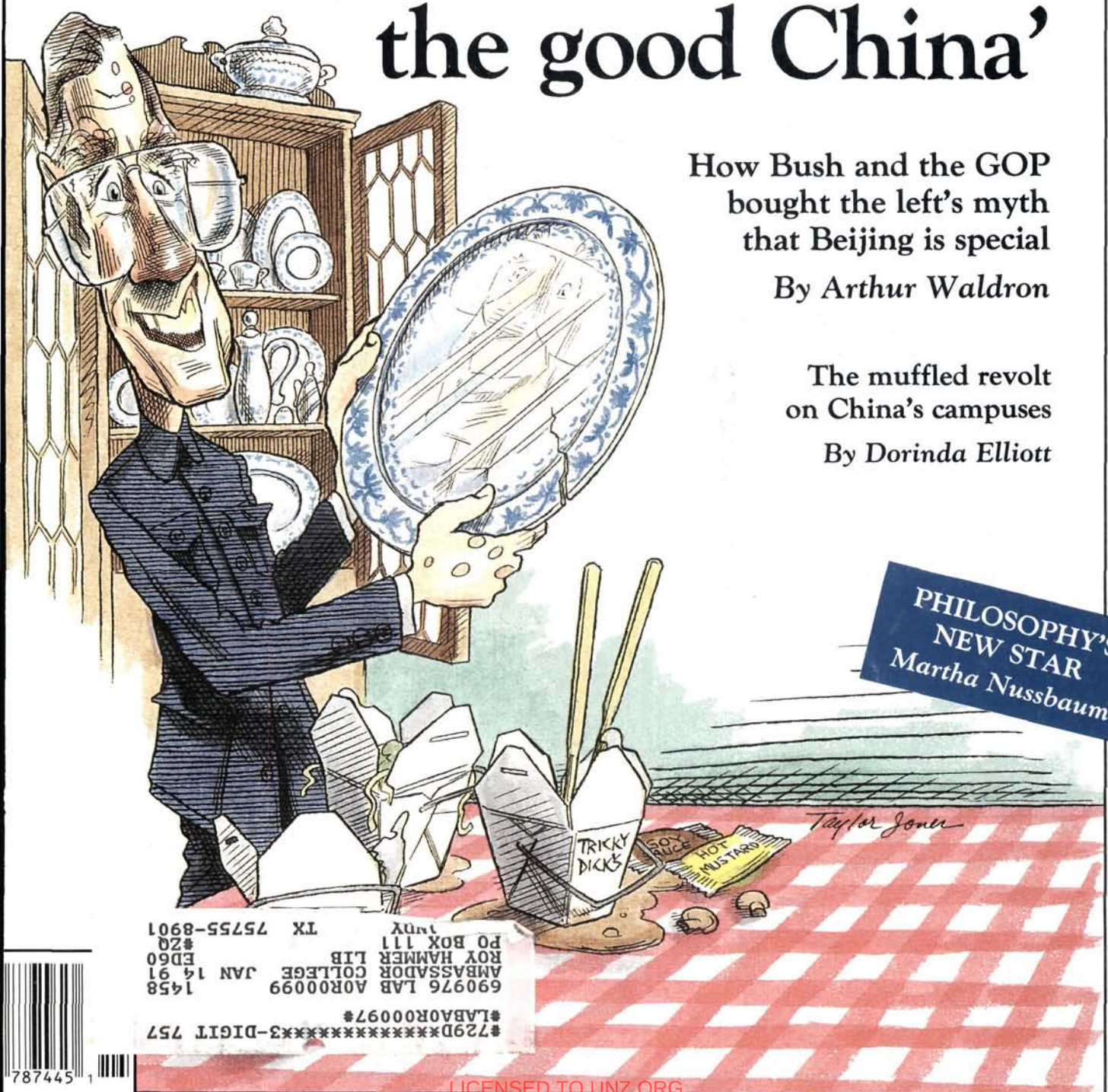
THE NEW REPUBLIC

Returns from East Germany · John Berryman's secrets, by Christopher Benfey

'Hey, Bar, let's bring out the good China'



How Bush and the GOP bought the left's myth that Beijing is special

By Arthur Waldron

The muffled revolt on China's campuses

By Dorinda Elliott

PHILOSOPHY'S NEW STAR
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CORRESPONDENCE

Right to bear corpses

To the editors:
After studying the debates over the Bill of Rights, I, like Michael Kinsley ("Second Thoughts," TRB, February 26), have concluded that the Second Amendment was intended to protect an individual's right to keep arms. But we must not forget that the muskets and rifles our Founders were familiar with were single-shot weapons capable of firing about four rounds per minute. Massacres by a momentarily crazed individual, all too common today, were unheard of in colonial times. And how many other crimes would be attempted today if the perpetrator were limited to single-shot weapons? Rigid observance of original intent must be tempered when conditions are significantly changed.

JOHN SARICH
Sacramento, California

To the editors:
Although Don Kates may envision himself as final arbiter of the Second Amendment, to portray him as such is at best presumptuous. This right, of course, lies with the U.S. Supreme Court. And the Court has consistently found that the Second Amendment does not protect an individual right to own a firearm.

Perhaps the most significant case is the 1980 decision in *Lewis* v. *United States*. The majority opinion, joined by both Justice Rehnquist and Chief Justice Burger, ruled that restrictions contained in the 1968 Gun Control Act prohibiting felons from owning firearms were constitutionally valid. The Court applied a "rational basis" standard (the Court need only find that the remedy is "rationally related to a legitimate purpose") to this case. This is significant because in determining whether a statute is constitutional, the Court typically subjects statutes that impinge on fundamental rights—such as freedom of speech—to the more rigorous "strict scrutiny" standard (the Court requires a higher burden of proof and a "compelling interest"). In *Lewis* the Court states, "These legislative restrictions on the use of firearms do not trench upon any constitutionally protected liberties."

The constitutional issue of the firearms debate is settled. The time is long past when we should be addressing the true issue: public safety.

M. KRISTEN RAND
Washington, D.C.

The writer is of counsel to the Firearms Policy Project.

A CENTURY OF ANTITRUST
THE LESSONS, THE CHALLENGES
A CATO INSTITUTE CONFERENCE
THE WILLARD HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C.
APRIL 11-12, 1990

Despite continued widespread acceptance of the rhetorical goals of antitrust, specific cases and the enforcement policies themselves have come under increasing attack as serving special interests rather than the public good. As the Sherman Antitrust Act, the first of the federal antitrust laws, approaches its centenary, it is an appropriate time for policymakers and analysts to take stock of the legacy of Senator Sherman and reevaluate the future of these influential laws.

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CATO INSTITUTE

To the editors:
Michael Kinsley is right that although liberals would like to believe otherwise, the Second Amendment means what it says. But he stops short of the obvious conclusion: it should be repealed.

In Jefferson's day the right to own weapons was the last guarantee against tyranny. In an established democracy, however, it is superfluous. If all other safeguards against oppression fail, a Saturday Night Special on the nightstand won't make much difference.

Further, in a society as criminal as ours, the right to buy and own weapons endangers lives and tempts the state to encroach on the *other* civil rights—the ones this country is really all about.

JACK ROBINSON
Riverside, California

Arousing abuse

To the editors:
In Alan Wolfe's review of the recent scholarship on pornography ("Dirt and Democracy," February 19), he makes wildly inaccurate claims about the nature of pornography and its effects on society. Wolfe asserts that "images men may have in their heads about stag films—any leftover memories of fraternity bashes of the 1950s—have nothing to do with what pornography represents now." What pornography represents now is exactly what it represented in the fifties and exactly what it has always represented: from stag films to *Playboy* to snuff, pornography says women are mere things, things to be acted upon, consumed, and dominated, things that ultimately crave male domination.

Wolfe also depicts male sexuality as if it were fixed and unchangeable, refusing to acknowledge how sexuality is shaped and reduced by male supremacist culture. ("We have libidos," he says. "They need outlets.") All forms of culture influence our behavior and teach us. Pornography is no exception. Pornography justifies, sanctions, and choreographs men's sexual abuse of women. Pornography numbs us to pain and cruelty, making pain and cruelty entertainment. In the end, pornography takes away our chance for freedom and obliterates eros.

ADAM THORBURN
Newton, Massachusetts

To the editors:
I hesitate to take issue with Alan Wolfe since I find his arguments so persuasive, but I cannot agree that pornography has "little redeeming social value" and is "without redeeming moral value."

Wolfe himself hints at the moral value

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Iranamok finale

Like most Americans, I haven't been following the John Poindexter trial with rapt attention. Like somewhat fewer, I feel a bit guilty about this. When Representative David Obey was upbraided last year for his tiresome curiosity about the Iran-contra affair, he said, "I didn't swear to uphold the Constitution until I got bored." Most of us never swore to uphold the Constitution at all. Still, it makes something of a mockery of our former outrage about the scandal that we can't even be bothered to follow the denouement. Were the skeptics right all along that the whole thing was blown out of proportion?

One small matter, though, has penetrated the thick skin of my indifference, and perhaps yours, too. Don't I vaguely remember that the scandal fizzled three years ago when former national security adviser John Poindexter declared to the Iran-contra congressional committee: "The buck stops here, with me"? When Poindexter refused to finger President Reagan, the Media Central Committee decreed that, as a national obsession, the case was closed. And yet Poindexter is now defending himself—defending himself on charges of lying to Congress, no less—by claiming that he was acting on orders from President Reagan. Gosh, isn't that a little, er, inconsistent?

Answer: it's not quite as inconsistent as it seems. When Poindexter said, "The buck stops here," he was talking specifically about the diversion of profits from the Iran arms sale to the Nicaraguan contras. Poindexter's trial is about the subsequent cover-up, and *that* is what he is trying to blame on President Reagan. However, in mounting his defense he actually does now allege that Reagan knew about the diversion—exactly what he denied in his immunized 1987 testimony. Yet in the court of public opinion, the case remains closed. Rulings of the Media Central Committee are unappealable.

Confusion and boredom turn out to be far more effective than a traditional cover-up. There was outrage the summer of 1987 when it was suggested that Reagan should simply pardon Poindexter and Oliver North. Yet what has happened, to general indifference, is a sort of round-robin of pardoning. Poindexter and North pardon Reagan by taking the blame upon themselves, then go for a pardon in turn by shifting the blame back onto Reagan. Responsibility is like a hot potato that gets passed around, but is always magically in the hands of whoever isn't the focus of attention at the moment.

North was acquitted on nine of twelve counts, including the most important, by persuading the jury that he had been made the "fall guy" by higher-ups. Now at the trial of Poindexter, North's next higher-up, he has suffered repeated bouts of those tragic failures of memory that strike everyone in this case from Reagan on down. When the fog of North's memory did clear, the figure who usually stood revealed was Robert McFarlane, Poindexter's predecessor, who conveniently has already copped a plea.

Most irritating of all, the cumulative effect of the round-robin guilt-shifting is to leave the impression that they've all been vindicated and there was nothing to be outraged about in the first place. Every time one of them gets off by blaming one of the others, *The Wall Street Journal* runs an editorial saying, "See? It's all nonsense." Who can keep track of what so-and-so said three years ago compared with what he's saying today, and still have time for golf?

The round-robin has been especially useful to President Bush. He has been able to claim that, as vice president, he knew nothing about these appalling goings-on, while at the same time embracing North for whatever political advantage can be derived from that.

Poindexter's own guilt on the principal charges against him is so obvious it's hardly worth discussing. The obfuscation necessary to mount a half-plausible defense is one of the things that makes the case so confusing. One main accusation is that Poindexter lied to members of Congress when he told them, in November 1986, that he knew nothing about one of the major shipments of missiles to Iran at the time it occurred a year earlier. At the Iran-contra hearings in 1987 he testified the exact opposite—that he was intimately involved in the deal—but this was under a grant of immunity, so it can't be used against him. Poindexter now doesn't claim he wasn't involved in the 1985 shipments, but he claims he suffered a "memory lapse" when asked about it a year later. Oddly, this "memory lapse" produced the same erroneous details as a false chronology prepared by a group at the NSC, for which North has already been convicted.

The same day as the "memory lapse," Poindexter tore up a document, signed by Reagan, justifying the November 1985 HAWK missile sale as part of a deal for release of the hostages. Poindexter concedes this. His defense is that he tore it up so as *not* to mislead Congress! It wasn't an arms-for-hostages deal after all, you see. Poindexter "wanted Congress to get accurate information and by golly he delivered accurate information to Congress," says his lawyer. Unfortunately North, the impresario of the deal, wrote at the time (in a memo that accidentally didn't get destroyed), "120 HAWKS = 1) 5 Amcits; 2) Guarantee no more." Amcits is Northspeak for American citizens. "Guarantee no more" meant no more hostages would be taken. The Iranians ratted on both parts of the deal.

The other major accusation is that Poindexter lied when he wrote to three congressional committees in July 1986 that the NSC was obeying "the spirit and the letter" of the Boland Amendment, which banned support for the contras. Poindexter's defense is that the Boland Amendment didn't apply to the NSC; therefore the NSC was obeying its "spirit and letter" by ignoring it. There is an argument—unconvincing, but at least serious—that the Boland Amendment was so badly worded that it did leave the NSC off the hook, though its obvious purpose was to cut off the contras completely. There is even an argument—also unconvincing but serious—that the Boland Amendment was unconstitutional. There is no serious argument that Poindexter was not trying to deceive Congress when he wrote that letter. He wanted legislators to think that the contras had been cut off, not that he'd found a scintillating new legal theory. They would have rewritten the law in five minutes if they'd known this was how the administration interpreted it.

Only a "sparse crowd," says *The Washington Post*, attended the first public airing of Reagan's taped testimony in the Poindexter trial. He duly played his part in the round-robin by declaring that the entire Iran-contra affair "was a covert action that was taken at my behest." That was no damaging confession since, he insisted, the arms sale was not a swap for hostages; it involved Iranian "moderates" unconnected to Khomeini; no one lied to Congress; Eugene Hasenfus, the operative whose capture by the Nicaraguans began the unraveling of the secret contra war, was just a private citizen; and so on—all matters long ago proved false.

The consensus of those who paid any attention to Reagan's amazing recital was: "Poor fellow, he's finally losing it." But Reagan's convenient senility is con-

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

APRIL 9, 1990

INDECENT REQUEST

Not long ago the National Endowment for the Arts notified ninety-seven writers that they had won grants to support their work. The letters of congratulation told them what they could and couldn't spend their fellowship money on (photocopying, yes; three-martini lunches, no), asked where they wanted their checks sent, and gave them telephone numbers to call for further information. Nothing out of the ordinary so far. But the letters also directed the attention of the NEA fellows to a new restriction: "None of the funds . . . may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce materials which in the judgment of the National Endowment for the Arts . . . may be considered obscene, including but not limited to, depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts and which, when taken as a whole, do not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." Please sign and return. Have a nice day.

Nine months after the fuss over "Piss Christ" and "Man in a Polyester Suit," the consequences of Congress's summer fling with intolerance are beginning to be felt. In addition to being forced to administer the sexual loyalty oath excerpted above, the NEA last November rescinded, then restored, a $10,000 grant to support an exhibition of art about AIDS that chairman John Frohnmayer deemed too political. The NEA's sister agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities, has been compelled to bring its own grant-making procedures under more direct control, prompting Princeton's prestigious Institute for Advanced Study to spurn several hundred thousand dollars of grants in protest. These are not the only incursions against free expression: the flag-burning controversy is alive and well. Since two federal judges recently found unconstitutional the statutory prohibition passed by Congress, there has been renewed talk of altering the Bill of Rights to prohibit flag-burning. The White House has reiterated its support for an amendment.

It is tempting to see in all of this a pattern of reverse glasnost, whereby the liberties rapidly expanding around the globe are being curtailed in minor ways in America through a combination of demagoguery and cowardice. One shies away from hysterical comparisons to unfree parts of the world. Nonetheless there seems to be an increased willingness on the part of the public and elected officials to tolerate real infringements on civil liberties, to find legal means to curtail expressions deemed shocking or offensive. The congressionally mandated anti-obscenity agreement hearkens back to the anti-Communist loyalty oaths demanded of government employees during the late 1940s and 1950s. The new oaths are both less dangerous and more egregious than their McCarthyite forebears: less dangerous, because they do not directly target political beliefs; and more egregious, because allegedly obscene art, unlike communism, cannot seriously be argued to be a threat to the security of the United States.

The new oath's defenders argue that it cannot be censorship to attach stipulations to a job or grant, goods to which no one has an automatic right. Moreover, the government is merely asking for a promise that those receiving public money won't misuse it. It doesn't sound like much of a restriction on the freedoms we hold dear.

But even if the oath is mostly symbolic, what it symbolizes is a defeat for free expression. Artists must swallow the implication that "homoeroticism" is on par with the sexual exploitation of children—take that, Walt Whitman!—and that depictions of individuals engaged in sex acts are by their nature obscene. But more disturbingly, they come a step closer to being servants of the state, who exercise the free play of their imaginations only within stated boundaries.

There is no need to be concerned in the United States, at the present time, about overt, official censorship, or even about a slippery slope that might lead to it. There would still be free expression if Congress required an explicit political test for all grant recipients, or if it made no grants at all. Even so, it is alarming for the state to attach strings to its largess. By doing so it decrees that rewards go to those who avoid offense. Artists may not admit the extent to which they censor themselves so as not to buck the system that provides for them: the worry is not over what Congress prevents them from saying,

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but what artists don't say in order to avert a run-in and a possible cutoff of funds. Artists who now need to think about what Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina might consider obscene may soon be prodded to eschew what he finds obscure, lest he accuse the NEA of wasting taxpayers' money on stuff nobody likes or understands.

NEA spokesmen say openly that they do not like the anti-obscenity requirement and that the Endowment won't institute any procedures to ensure that artists comply with it. There can hardly be an artist or writer in the country who thinks the stipulation well-advised. Still, the NEA will send out the pledge to hundreds more grant recipients this year, and judging by the response so far, most will sign it, rather than protest and forfeit their cherished subsidies. The rationalizations are many. Any writer or painter can tell himself the agreement will have no effect on him. The provision is vague and unenforceable. He will not bend to obey it. By definition he creates nothing that lacks "artistic value" and so is exempt from the ban in any case.

It would be nice to see at least one writer reject the offer to become a lap dog, and return his $20,000 fellowship check. It would be even nicer to see all of them join such a protest. This is a great deal to ask; without government grants some artists would have to give up their careers. But for their inability to say no thank you, they bear a measure of culpability themselves. By their unwillingness to accept the consequences of their position, artists become complicit in the wrong done to them. "It's ironic that we've spent all these years reading about restrictions in Eastern Europe and just when they're gaining freedom we're beginning to feel restricted," said Martha Collins, a writer who received one of the ninety-seven letters. Yet Collins signed the agreement, she told *The New York Times*, "because I can live with it." She could probably "live" with more severe restrictions, but unless she and other artists draw a line somewhere, they will almost certainly face more unpleasant limitations.

The Arts Endowment also bears a share of the blame. Frohnmayer says that as a federal official he is enjoined from lobbying against the ban. "I do think the statute is unnecessary, and I hope that Congress in its wisdom will not see fit to continue it," he says. But the statute is worse than unnecessary. By limiting what can and can't be said with its financial support, the government undermines its effort to cultivate the arts. Money with strings is worse than no money at all. Defenders of public funding for the arts must be less flexible on this point than they have been so far. Frohnmayer should not only oppose, but refuse to carry out his new congressional mandate. If that were to cost him his job, he would have the consolation of reflecting that the position of obscenity oversight coordinator isn't much of a post anyway.

Frohnmayer hides behind the argument used by members of Congress to defend their indefensible compromise on the anti-obscenity language. Legislators claimed that unless they met Helms halfway, he and his allies would exact a terrible retribution against federal support for the arts and humanities as a whole. It's unlikely any such vindictive effort would have succeeded: slashing the NEA and NEH is not likely to prove popular with the public. But even the total elimination of these agencies would be preferable to an enfeebled existence, where every grant is evaluated on the basis of what Jesse will think. The arts will survive in America with or without government support. With restrictions like the ones recently imposed, however, the cultural life of the country stands only to suffer.

It is important to remember that the real culprit is not the NEA, or the artists it assists, but Congress. When the Helms Amendment was introduced last summer, few were willing to express vocal, principled opposition to it. Obsessed by visions of campaign challengers waving dirty photos, liberals were quick to settle for a compromise that they hoped would end the debate and protect the NEA and NEH from further fallout. We are now tasting the sour fruits of the deal they made. Helms is not satisfied. He still wants his ban on government funding for offensive art and will press for it when Congress holds hearings on a reauthorization bill for the Arts Endowment later this year. When that clash comes, it would be nice to see legislators show some guts in resisting his bullying demagoguery. It would be pleasing, too, if they repealed the clean art loyalty oath they so foolishly passed last year. Unfortunately, the momentum is all in the other direction.

Sounds of Silence

Lithuanians going peacefully about their business have been hearing a sound that Mikhail Gorbachev had been widely assumed to have silenced: the rattling of the Soviet saber. There is the crack of sonic booms as Soviet jets repeatedly buzz Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, at faster-than-sound speeds; there is the rumble of troop carriers as Soviet military units move about the city and the countryside on shadowy missions; and there is the tramp of boots as KGB security forces take up positions at customs offices, factories, and power plants.

All this is rather more serious than what we too sanguinely called it last week, "haggling over price." Despite its repeated statements that force will not be used, even Moscow doesn't seem to know what Moscow's ultimate response to the Lithuanians' assertion of independence will be. "Tanks will not help in this matter," conceded Yegor Ligachev, the Politburo's leading hard-liner. But he and his colleagues evidently believe that a bit of armor won't hurt, either. In what cannot be other than an effort to intimidate and threaten, they have already, after a fashion, sent in the tanks. Widespread military maneuvers on the soil of historic Lithuania, undertaken without warning, are reminding the locals that they court a confrontation with the terrifying force of Soviet armed might.

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Nor has Moscow's immediate reaction to Lithuania's insistence on retrieving its independence been limited to symbolic evocations of what might be in store militarily. The routine civil life of Lithuanians is already being harassed in ways that are meant to make them feel isolated and alone. International telephone traffic, for example, has simply been cut off. Deliveries of industrial materials and of fuels have been demonstratively slowed; there are reports that some plants are already idle due to artificially contrived shortages. Instructions from Moscow to public enterprises and public offices forbid them to deal with Lithuanian authorities on the modalities of interstate relations. Such negotiations are the province, the Kremlin insists, of the Kremlin alone. At the same time, the Kremlin has made clear that such are precisely the negotiations it won't entertain.

When a Lithuanian delegate to the Congress of People's Deputies tried last week to explain why his people wanted independence, he was simply silenced by the shouting of fellow deputies. The question for Gorbachev, however, is not whether one Lithuanian can be beaten down but whether they all can be beaten down.

In its formal statement on what it continues to insist on calling "the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic," the Soviet government congratulates itself on "viewing with understanding problems of Lithuania's political, social, economic, national, and cultural development," and on "respecting the desire of its people to renew society and strengthen the republic's sovereignty." Gorbachev's problem is that what the Lithuanians have rightfully claimed is sovereignty itself, not some twilight half-sovereignty that can be "strengthened" at leisure. Their claim was as much as acknowledged by the Soviet government itself when, to general applause, it denounced the Stalin-Hitler pact that was the "legal" basis for the Baltics' colonization. Similar claims are sure to be advanced very soon not only by the other Baltic states but also by Georgia, by Moldavia, and eventually by the Ukraine, where nationalist political insurgents have just won a convincing victory in local elections.

The Soviet president's attitude toward these developments seems to veer back and forth between anger and resignation. If he gives way to anger he will destroy his own freedom along with the Lithuanians'. He would do well to reflect that he will have his hands full trying to manage his own country's transition to democratic politics and market economics. Perhaps he can manage that transformation and perhaps he cannot, but he surely cannot have it and empire too.

MURDER IN BAGHDAD

We shall never know whether the hangman in Baghdad would have been so swift had the free-lance journalist Farzad Bazoft been a Westerner. Perhaps the outcome of the cruel affair that ended with Bazoft's murder on March 15 would have been the same. "First Son" Uday Hussein, scion of Baghdad's ruler, says that it was too bad Bazoft could only be killed once, that he should have been killed once for espionage and sixty times for his Iranian origins. Saddam's son should know about such matters. Last year he murdered one of his father's bodyguards, bludgeoning him to death with a hammer. There was brave talk of justice and punishment. But the son has been rehabilitated; he now heads his country's Olympic Committee and soccer league. A chip off the old block, this Uday Hussein. He was spared, a gift of his father's regime to the country.

No such luck for Farzad Bazoft. Back in September he had gone to Iraq on a government-organized press trip. He even enjoyed special access to Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoun (a former Iraqi ambassador to the United States who in his time charmed and courted the Washington establishment). While in Iraq Bazoft heard of an explosion at a secret military installation south of Baghdad that was rumored to have caused 700 deaths. He tracked down the site, disguised himself as a physician, and obtained photographs and a soil sample. On his way out of the country, he was arrested, "tried," then put to death.

It has not been long since Baghdad's apologists were telling us of a friendly, "pragmatic" regime on the Tigris. Saddam may have been a bully and an upstart, the emissaries and the lobbyists said, but he had walked away from his cruel past and was chastened by the long campaign against Iran. In this benign view, peddled by an assortment of promoters—Egyptians, Palestinians, and Americans forever eager for a "moderate" pillar in so tangled a region—Iraq was to be a place where our commerce and our political goals would thrive. At the height of the Iranian revolution we were sold a grand design: our purposes were best served, we came to believe, by a "Sunni pact" between Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. That pact, we were assured, would quarantine the Iranian revolution and check its extremism. To that end we repaired our relations with Iraq, gave the Iraqis access to military intelligence, to commercial credit, and to a measure of respectability that proved helpful in their conflict with Iran.

There was blood on Saddam's hands, to be sure. This was a regime that used poison gas against its own people and imprisoned children for the "deviation" of their parents. But the apologists who urged this policy of "constructive engagement" in Baghdad looked past these horrors. Saddam's victims were, after all, rebellious Kurdish mountaineers and Shiites at odds with his regime. And they were faceless. We were treated to tales of large brutalities and to the usual denials by the regime and its lackeys. Now the cruelty has taken on a personal dimension that is harder to run away from.

Saddam, of course, could have chosen to pardon. That too is part of the mystique of authority, part of

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the sultan's prerogative in so cruel a land. On the face of it this was a chance, and a cost-free one at that, to show a better side of the despotism. But that is not Saddam's way. And the dictator had messages to transmit. The murder was his way of telling his people that autocracy was there to stay, that the democratic trend sweeping other despots aside would pass them by, that they would be left to his tender mercies. And there was a brazen message to the outside world as well. We have been waiting for the shape of things in postwar Iraq to emerge. This was Saddam's "coming out" in style. He would take no prisoners, accept no restraints. His state may be heavily in debt and battered by its eight-year war with Iran, but he would not heed the call of outsiders. He had ridden greater storms, and he had never really been censured for his crimes, either by the Arab world around him or by mightier powers beyond.

Give Baghdad's tyrant his due: on the whole he has been consistent in what he has been telling us about himself and his regime. It is no fault of his if we choose to believe otherwise, if men and women from safe and orderly places journey to a republic of fear and murder and return with tales of a friendly regime and a vast, lucrative market.

NOTEBOOK

McGLOP: Out of the dim past (and the Connecticut innkeeping business) and into the pages of *The Boston Globe* comes George McGovern, who surfaces with a March 18 article urging that the United States cut off all (not some) aid to Israel unless the Israelis promptly begin negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization. It's tempting to think that this is nothing more than a perverse manifestation of old George's chronic isolationism. But if isolationism can account for his yen to dump Israel, it doesn't quite explain his eagerness to get next to the PLO. Maybe he's just infatuated with Yasir Arafat. Declaring he has "passed through the stages of naïveté and gullibility," McGovern adds, as if in a legal deposition: "I now assert my firm belief that Arafat is the kind of man both Israel and the United States will find to be a reliable and reasonable negotiator." Furthermore, writes the man who at the height of his 1972 presidential campaign went into a Kosher delicatessen and ordered a pastrami on white with mayonnaise, he's only trying to preserve "the ethical and spiritual ideals of Judaism." Finally, he raises the hoary threat that we will lose the friendship of "100 million Arabs . . . because of the unfairness of our Middle East policy." Give us a break, George. Even you must know that the world is more complex, and the Arabs less sentimental, than that.

BENIGN GROWTH: Leave it to Lee Atwater—now on the mend, we're glad to say—to spin-control his own brain tumor. He's been telling reporters that his bout with illness has turned him into a kinder, more mellow Republican National Committee chairman. "I can't imagine me getting back in a fighting mood," Atwater told a South Carolina paper. "I don't see how I'm ever going to be mean." Elsewhere he spoke of losing his interest in money and power thanks to a new love for "mankind in general." To paraphrase a comment of Evelyn Waugh's, doctors appear to have found the only part of Mr. Atwater that isn't malignant. Let's hope they don't have to remove it. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

PLAYING BALL

By Fred Barnes

The scheme began innocently enough. On March 6 Democratic Representative Dan Rostenkowski, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, dropped by the White House for a meeting with John Sununu, President Bush's chief of staff, and budget director Richard Darman. The subject was child care legislation. Sununu and Darman were eager to build a coalition with Rostenkowski to pass a relatively conservative bill and thwart the more liberal legislation that had already cleared the Senate. After they chatted, Sununu said, "Let's go see the president." Rostenkowski, an old pal of Bush, said the president might not want to see him anymore after he uncorks his new tax and budget proposal. That was the first Sununu and Darman had heard of it. But not the last.

Rostenkowski's proposal was unveiled in *The Washington Post* five days later. Practically everything in it—raising the top tax rate on individual income, boosting excise taxes, slashing Pentagon spending, blocking the Social Security cost-of-living increase—conflicts with Bush's public position. But rather than attack Rostenkowski, the White House praised him. Why? Bush doesn't have the luxury of publicly denouncing everything he opposes. He lacks a reliable majority in Congress. To get anything passed, he must create a different coalition each time. This rules out rallying the nation and overpowering Congress on one issue, because that might alienate folks needed as allies on another issue. (It probably wouldn't work either.) Instead, Bush plays a finesse game.

More precisely, Darman does. He excels at the ploys and stratagems and private deal-making that are required. Bush goes along. In the Oval Office on March 12 Darman spelled out his scheme for courting Rosten-

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kowski to Bush, Sununu, and Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater. Let's laud Rostenkowski for making a serious stab at reducing the deficit and say we're willing to negotiate, Darman said. But no specifics, no verdict on any of the particular measures in his proposal except Gramm-Rudman (Rosty wants to eliminate it, Bush doesn't). That way we'll transform Rostenkowski into a real player again on Capitol Hill. He's a guy we can deal with, but he's been cut out of the action by Democratic leaders. "Well," responded Bush, "if you feel that way, fine. I like Rostenkowski."

Fitzwater stuck tightly to Darman's scheme. "We can say that [Rostenkowski's] plan deserves some credit for making a serious and thoughtful approach, and a comprehensive approach to deficit reduction," Fitzwater told reporters. "There's some room to talk here." Specifics? "I can't really give you a reaction to each provision here . . . I just don't want to go through it provision by provision." Neither did Bush at his press conference the next day. He noted Rostenkowski's motives, extolling "the evident goodwill on his part and determination to try to break the ice and move the process forward."

Bush's embrace gave the Rostenkowski proposal legs, which pleased everyone at the White House. "For Bush, goodwill with Rosty is enough to do what we did," says a senior official. "That's all the president expects to get out of it." Sununu, the official says, was happy to have created political mischief. "It changed the focus in Washington," the official argues. "It buried the debate on Moynihan's payroll tax cut. It gave Rosty a new lease on life. It pissed off [Senate Majority Leader George] Mitchell. It scored on all fronts."

Darman wants more. From the start, he's believed that Rostenkowski is the crucial player in any coalition to pass Bush's capital gains cut (from twenty-eight percent to twenty percent, or lower). Last year Rostenkowski balked, and Darman was forced to rely on the old alliance of Republicans and conservative Democrats. That was sufficient to get the cut out of Ways and Means over Rostenkowski's objection and through the House. It died in the Senate. Darman is persuaded that without Rostenkowski's backing the cap-gains cut will fail again this year. But if he signs on—for a price—that will add political heft and lure more Democrats, maybe dozens of them.

On child care too the White House discovered last year that the combination of Republicans and conservative Democrats wasn't enough. Last October the bill favored by Bush (mostly tax credits, some direct aid) seemed headed for passage. At the last moment House Speaker Tom Foley and Majority Leader Dick Gephardt pressured Democrats to back off. About twenty did, and the bill lost. Darman and Sununu met twice with Rostenkowski to enlist him this year. But Foley squelched any deal by taking the issue out of Rostenkowski's hands and bringing it directly to the House floor in late March. Rostenkowski backed Foley's bill, thus barring any GOP-Rostenkowski coalition on child care.

On clean air the White House put together a coalition of the center. In the Senate that meant negotiating a compromise with Mitchell, not the White House's favorite Democrat. Left to their own devices, Bush and Darman might have shied away from this. But once Senate GOP leader Bob Dole announced talks with Mitchell, they had to join. A compromise was reached. In the House, coalition politics required Bush to craft his clean air bill to appeal to Democratic Representative John Dingell, the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, in particular and moderate Democrats in general. It did. As a result, Bush should have a bill to sign that only economic conservatives (the especially ardent ones) and environmental zealots will fault.

By the way, Bush plays a role in concocting new coalitions. Among other things, he skillfully schmoozes members of Congress at the White House. This counts for something. Dingell, a Polish-American, was invited to a small reception for Lech Walesa on December 13. When Bush introduced Dingell, he told Walesa that the congressman was one of the most influential political leaders in the nation. Bush said he'd had Dingell at his side when he initially laid out his policy toward Poland last year in a speech in Hamtramck, Michigan. Walesa looked impressed. In mid-March Bush invited the entire Congressional Black Caucus to the White House. A dozen members came. "Let's go upstairs," Bush announced when they arrived. He gave them the full tour, including the Truman Balcony. (Bush is angling for black support on child care.) On Fridays Bush often invites two or three members of Congress to watch movies at the White House. Every time he takes a trip on Air Force One, he invites the entire congressional delegation of the state he's visiting. They eagerly tag along.

All this is inside baseball, not high political drama. In the Bush era, that's all we've got. Big issues are stalemated, forgotten, irrelevant, or being played out elsewhere in the world. The press is left with dithering over small matters (I'll confess to this) or trying to foment controversy. The supposedly bitter feud between Bush and Gephardt, for instance, is largely a press creation. The two scarcely know each other. For each, the other is simply a handy target.

Still, there's one big issue that the overtures to Rostenkowski touch on. Darman, who's bored with tinkering, yearns for a grand compromise to wipe out the deficit. He hasn't told White House associates that he's anxious to cut a deal. But they suspect he has that in mind, maybe a year or two from now. "Darman's the only person here who thinks that far off," says an official. With Rostenkowski, Darman's chances of forging a grand compromise, one that doesn't involve a big tax rate increase, may be slim. Without Rostenkowski, there's no chance at all. If Darman pulls it off, my guess is that Bush will respond the same as he did to Darman's scheme to lovebomb Rostenkowski. He'll go along. •

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POTSDAM POSTCARD

MONEY VOTES

By David Bell

Even today this charming East German city where Frederick the Great sought to build a Prussian Versailles symbolizes the division of Europe in the bluntest form. Just a fifteen-minute stroll from the palace of San Souci lies the nerve center for the hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops in East Germany—men whose uniforms bear the only hammers and sickles now to be seen between the Oder and Brest-Litovsk (minus a few radical neighborhoods of West Berlin). A massive bust of Lenin still stands in front of the Soviet officers' club in the town center, and half a mile north is a spacious park named "The Russian Colony," dotted with perfect re-creations of Russian log houses. Soviet soldiers wobble through on bicycles with ludicrously small wheels—a sight guaranteed to dissipate any remaining fears of a Soviet threat. Nevertheless, this is still a small piece of the steppes in the middle of Brandenburg, and Potsdam will not fully recover its normality until the colony's inhabitants depart.

Meanwhile a new, more benign form of "colonization"—or, as East German cynics put it, "Kohl-onization" (*Kohlinisierung*)—has already begun. Since November West German tourists have flooded the town's cafés and street markets. They have clearly brought prosperity. One shop now advertises compact disks; an enterprising Potsdamer has set up a small copying business—this in a city where six months ago the unlicensed use of a photocopying machine might have resulted in a prison term. Most remarkably, a West German travel agency now operates out of a luxury bus parked on the Platz der Nationen. For prices ranging from $20 (a hefty sum by East German standards) to $250, it offers excursions to once-forbidden Hamburg and a north German amusement park.

Some of the visitors were apparently interested in more than casual shopping: a wall poster in a residential neighborhood warns Potsdamers to protect their interests against West Germans looking for real estate bargains. Potsdam is close to Berlin, and prices are sure to rise astronomically when the new East German government lifts the ban on Westerners buying property here.

Yet away from the elegant Brandenburgerstrasse (which until recently suffered under the name Klement Gottwaldstrasse, after the first Communist dictator of Czechoslovakia), prosperity still has a long way to go. In most neighborhoods the sturdy Prussian facades have blackened and crumbled from pollution and lack of attention; bricks peer out from beneath the rotting plaster like unhealed scabs. On the outskirts of town horse-drawn wagons trundle along the roads (in front of frustrated BMW drivers from the West), delivering the molded lumps of dark coal that still provide the main source of heat. And though every Potsdamer under forty seems to have a new pair of Western blue jeans, most still wear square, klutzy East German shoes.

In the election the Potsdam region split its votes equally between the Social Democrats (SDP) and the conservatives (CDU), in theory expressing more hesitation about the rush to unification than was shown in the country as a whole. Yet as the West German press pointed out, the pattern of voting throughout East Germany corresponded roughly to pre-1933—an almost magical affirmation of history in the face of more than half a century of dictatorship and dislocation.

On election night a West Berlin friend could not contain his disgust over the conservative victory (most young West Berliners seem to put the well-meaning, buffoonish Helmut Kohl somewhere between Dracula and the Antichrist). The East Germans had betrayed their own victories in November for a "*drang nach D-Mark*," he complained, parodying the old German concept of the "*drang nach Osten*" (the drive to the East). "All they care about is money." East German motives may seem crass to cosseted West German students. But after fifty-seven terrible years, caring about money—about normal, mundane things—seems on the whole a welcome change.

DAVID BELL studies history at Princeton University.

Saddam Hussein's rule of terror.

FEAR OF DYING

By Robert D. Kaplan

It is the most primitive of instincts. You find yourself on an empty street at night in a neighborhood you have no business being in. Your stomach turns in upon itself, you sweat, your eyes dance around, and afterward no expert is going to convince you that you were not in danger. The hanging on March 15 in Baghdad of Farzad Bazoft, a London-based journalist carrying British papers, caused me to relive this fear—one I and many foreign journalists had all the time we were in Iraq.

Of course, the fact of Bazoft's Iranian birth, and his foolhardy zealousness in investigating an explosion at a military installation, put him at particular risk. In a country where the press is arguably the most anti-Semitic in the entire Arab world, being of Iranian de-

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scent raised greater suspicion than being Jewish. And inspecting the scene of a military accident was just asking for trouble unless a dozen other journalists were willing to go along. But in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, it could have happened to any of us. Bazoft, though maybe no angel, was no spy. British officials stated that an exhaustive investigation, involving the Israeli and several major Western intelligence services, cleared Bazoft of any suspicion of espionage.

In no other country I have visited, in Africa, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe—with the lone exception of Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania—is the sense of impending violence so suffocating. For journalists who reported the Gulf War, Iraq was a scarier place than Iran. Because Iran was revolutionary, it was chaotic and disorganized. This created its own breathing space (the detention of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Gerald Seib notwithstanding). Iraq was like a huge prison yard, lit up at night with high-wattage, scanning lamps. "If for some reason you attract the interest of the security services here, boy, you're in trouble, and there's not much we can do for you," an American diplomat admitted to me in 1986, at the time of my second visit. Attracting the interest of the security service, according to a Canadian diplomat I spoke with in 1984, meant "doing anything that a moron or paranoid might consider suspicious. . . . Whatever you do," he advised me, "don't open a map, even a tourist map, in the streets." This was no hyperbole. In Syria, where the security apparatus is less pervasive, a New Zealand scholar was arrested and held incommunicado for a few hours for looking at a map of Damascus on the street.

Your first fear upon landing at Saddam International Airport, decorated with hundreds of portraits of Saddam (whatever you do, don't even think of laughing), is that customs officials will confiscate your portable typewriter or computer. As in Ceausescu's Romania, in Iraq anything that produces words is dangerously suspect. I know of several colleagues who had their equipment either confiscated or deliberately broken by airport security men in Baghdad.

A bus service run by Filipinos and Pakistanis (the fewer Iraqis in contact with foreigners the better, according to the government) takes you from the airport to the Palestine Meridien or Ishtar Sheraton: hotels forming one complex under round-the-clock surveillance, grafted onto the mud-strewn, Mesopotamian landscape like launch pads on the cratered surface of the moon. In Iraq luxury hotels are life-support systems in the creature-comfort sense only. Otherwise, they are every bit as sinister as the environment outside. The lobbies are filled with "Hollywood uglies," insectlike men with plasticized ID cards, who stare at you through wraparound sunglasses and wear bulging sports coats. True, you find such men in other Arab and Third World capitals, but in Baghdad there are just so many more of them.

In Damascus I could go over to a telex machine, sit down, and punch out my story, even send it unsupervised if the duty person happened to be on a tea break. In Baghdad plate glass separates you from the telex equipment. You hand your story to an Iraqi on the other side of the window and that's that. Going to Damascus from Baghdad was like coming up for air.

Aside from the security people, the telex operators were often the only Iraqis in the hotel. The rest of the staff was Asian, and the bellhops were Egyptian. They were all prisoners, rarely allowed outside the hotel grounds except under supervision. It's hard to know how many of these guest workers were tortured or even executed for black market dealings, or some such crime. Once, in the early-1980s, a carload of Asian workers drew automatic fire for making a wrong turn and coming within a hundred yards of a palace security gate. One of them was reportedly killed. Nobody said anything. Their governments (the Egyptian government was once an exception) usually keep their mouths shut about such incidents—the price of employing a work force abroad to earn hard currency.

A conspiracy of silence extends to Western countries too. In Baghdad there is the ongoing story of some unfortunate Western technician or businessman, held without charges for "security violations." His embassy, you are told, is protesting quietly and strenuously, convinced the man is innocent. These people are usually released, after suffering varying degrees of brutality. To my knowledge, the last such incident involving an American occurred in 1983, when an engineer at the Novo hotel was forcibly taken away from his wife and three daughters at Saddam International Airport, held for several months, and tortured, without being formally charged. Not too long afterward, Iraq and the United States re-established diplomatic relations.

The British are currently the ones in a delicate position. Because Saddam is holding two other British hostages—Daphne Parish, sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for driving Bazoft to the scene of the explosion, and a British businessman, Ian Richter, held for alleged bribery for four years now—the British government's response to the execution has been measured. The Iraqi ambassador in London has not been expelled. Relations have not been broken. Though a handful of Iraqi exchange students were sent home, trade continues unaffected. At some point, perhaps after one of the two British hostages is released, the whole incident may blow over and the British ambassador will return to Baghdad after completing his "consultations." Bazoft's murder will be seen as yet another bad dream in a creepy country. Its volunteer army of foreign apologists—the same ones who ran interference for Saddam after he gassed 5,000 Kurds in March 1988—will simply shrug and soldier on to the next incident. Here is the difference between the Saddam regime and the Shiite terrorists holding hostages in Lebanon: Saddam can borrow billions of dollars on credit and has billions of dollars' worth of construction contracts to offer.

I was last issued a visa to Iraq in order to visit a group of pro-Iraqi Kurds in the north. To make sure I reported on nothing else (the Gulf War was going badly

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for Saddam), Iraqi security men confiscated my passport at the airport and handed me over to officials of the Kurdish group. I was to remain in their custody for the duration of my visit. Two weeks later, while in the security service vehicle returning me to the airport, my passport was handed back.

In Iraq you really are on your own in a dark alley. The men with the switchblades are in total control. The rest are either cowering in the corners or paying some form of protection in order to keep their businesses going.

ROBERT D. KAPLAN's latest book is *Soldiers of God: With the Mujahidin in Afghanistan* (Houghton Mifflin).

The revolution is over.

VANISHING ACT

By Robert Darnton

BERLIN

East Germany has voted itself out of existence. Given their first chance in fifty-seven years to say what they wanted at the polls, the voters made the message clear: union with the Federal Republic, and the sooner the better. The election was really a referendum on unification—not whether it should take place, but how, at what pace, and by whom. Since November the East Germans have voted with their feet, pouring across the border at a rate of 2,000 a day. On March 18 they voted the same way with their ballots: for *Anschluss*, or immediate annexation to the Federal Republic.

Anschluss has a terrible echo to the Anglo-American ear. It summons up the annexation of Austria by Hitler in 1938 and the German expansion that led to World War II. But East Germany was not in an expansive mood on March 18. Instead of tearing about in cars with horns blowing and fists waving, most people watched the election reports on television and went to bed. By 10 p.m. the streets of East Berlin were empty. Monday was a work day, and work was what everyone seemed to want—good jobs at good wages in the world that lay on the other side of the wall.

It was a mild conclusion to a "gentle revolution," as the events since last October are called here. There was little left of the excitement and idealism that pulsated through the body politic last autumn. The citizens' groups identified with the revolution nearly disappeared in the wave of votes for the conservative Alliance for Germany, sponsored by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, which received forty-eight percent of the vote. The revolution is over.

But so is the old regime. The former Communist Party (PDS) did quite well (sixteen percent of the vote), considering its demoralized state last January. But it will be reduced to an isolated role in the opposition, because no other party wants to form a coalition with it.

All the talk on election night was of a center-left alliance between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD). But on the morning after, SPD officials announced that the party preferred to remain in the opposition, and it looked as though the new regime would be governed from the center right. The SPD did so badly (just under twenty-two percent of the vote) that the new government seemed likely to resemble the West German model. With its partners—the German Social Union (DSU, a counterpart to the Christian Social Union in West Germany) and Democratic Beginning (DA)—the CDU controls 193 seats of the new, 400-seat parliament. If it forms a coalition with the Liberals, who got twenty-one seats, it would have an absolute majority, and that would be a mirror image of the coalition that rules in West Germany. Nothing could conform better to Kohl's prescription for uniting the two Germanys. Nothing could better represent the takeover of East German politics by the West.

Kohl's campaigning in the GDR certainly smacked of Westernization. At rallies in six cities he appeared before a total of about 800,000 people, one-fifteenth of the electorate. Advance men from the West CDU prepared his way, combining Western p.r. with what they took to be down-home GDR values. Thus, one of the fliers distributed in Rostock said: "Once before, about 120 years ago, a chancellor unified Germany—Otto von Bismarck. Today it is Helmut Kohl who is bringing us unity."

In most places, Kohl was received with cheers. But were the crowds celebrating him, the CDU, West Germany, or the fact that a West German chancellor was proclaiming their place in a "united German fatherland"? A crowd of 150,000 had shouted, "Helmut! Helmut!" at the climactic rally in Leipzig on March 15. But many of the same people had cheered just as loudly for former SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in the same city on the same day. A plane had circled overhead dragging a streamer that said, "Welcome Helmut!" No one knew which Helmut was intended.

The signals have been hard to read in the GDR, even for the East Germans. Almost none of them had ever voted in a free election, seen a Western politician in the flesh, or responded to a pollster. According to the polls, half of them did not know which way to vote a week before the election. Of course, there was a great deal of handwriting on the walls. One poster, spread all over East Berlin by a left-wing group, simply said, "NEIN." Its meaning was clear: stop the stampede toward unification. So a right-wing group went around painting out the first N, and it became "EIN" (one), an appeal for a united Germany ("*Deutschland einig Vaterland*," according to the most popular slogan on the right).

The best place to take the pulse of East Berlin during the last week of the campaign was the northwestern sector of Alexanderplatz, which turned into a kind of Hyde Park Corner. But instead of listening to orators

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on soap boxes, the East Berliners improvised one-on-one debates, surrounded by clusters of kibitzers. The themes were always the same. "Forty years of experimentation with socialism is enough," one would say. "The only way to prosperity is over *there*" (*drüben*, a term for West Germany that makes it sound as though it lies somewhere over the rainbow). "Don't kid yourself," another would reply. "Capitalism means high prices, high rents, and high unemployment."

The second argument seemed to be gaining ground, at least in Berlin, on the eve of the election, and the former Communists made the most of it. In a series of hard-hitting speeches Gregor Gysi, the leader of the PDS, played on the public's fears of what unification would cost. He did not oppose union in itself. He attacked Kohl's version, an "instant, forced merger of the two Germanys. That would be a total capitulation before the powers of capital. The West German constitution doesn't even recognize a right to work. It just says you can choose a job—if you can find one. It's the same with the currency union . . . don't let yourself be fooled. At West German prices, we will all be beggars."

Last fall, when the Communists held a monopoly of power, that kind of rhetoric would have been dismissed as propaganda. But as the East Germans neared the election, they seemed to worry that it might be a prophecy. Forty years of indoctrination had left them with a genuine fear of the wicked capitalist world, which used to be located safely behind the "anti-fascist protection barrier" (the Wall), and which now was offering to annex them. Moreover, they had a great deal to lose: cheap food, low rents, guaranteed employment, and a safe pension system.

True, those benefits were subsidized by a state-run economy that was so inefficient that it kept the country far below West Germany's level of prosperity. But Gysi made West Germany sound like a threat to the roof over everyone's head and the ground under everyone's feet, for West Germans once owned many of the apartment houses that are now state property in the GDR as well as much of the land that is now farmed by cooperatives or collectives. The PDS made unification sound like expropriation.

But when the moment of truth came on March 18, Gysi's prophecy of doom and the Social Democrats' moderate variations of it wilted before the Bismarckian appeal of Kohl. Seen negatively, the victory of the CDU was a rejection of everything that smacked of the old Communist system. Seen positively, it represented a commitment to Western democracy—or at least to West German prosperity. In either case, the triumph of the CDU in the East seems certain to strengthen the CDU in the West, where Kohl will stand for re-election on December 2.

One can already recognize the main outlines of a new political landscape. The East has come to resemble the West. In the process, something has been lost, something represented by the little parties and citizens' groups that proliferated last fall. They claimed to speak for a "GDR identity" as well as causes such as feminism, environmental protection, disarmament, and home-brewed beer. The electoral law actually favored them, because it provided for proportional representation without a requirement for a minimal share in the vote. As a consequence, a tiny party such as the German Beerdrinkers' Union could win a place in the new parliament with only 0.25 percent of the vote nationwide.

This system provided a counterbalance to the weight of the CDU, SPD, and FDP (Free Democrats), who drew on their big-brother parties in West Germany for funds, expertise, and media stars. The little parties, with the exception of the Greens, prided themselves on having no analogues in the West. Their candidates did not have blow-dried hair, did not know how to catch the little red eye of the TV camera, could not even get through a speech without stumbling. They crowded onto the ballot, which included twenty-four parties in all, some of them coalitions of still smaller citizens' groups. But when the ballots were counted, they were flattened by the well-oiled party machines from the West.

The counting of the ballots and the balloting itself were important ceremonies throughout the GDR. At Local 650 in the Prenzlauer Berg district of East Berlin, a working-class neighborhood full of decrepit tenements, the electoral board supervised the ballot box (a cardboard carton with a slit in the top) from seats lined against the walls. There were seven members on the board, representing as many different parties. When the voters arrived, they showed their identification cards, received a ballot, and walked behind a "booth" (a three-sided plasterboard screen, borrowed from a district in West Berlin). There they placed an X in a circle next to the name of the party of their choice, folded the ballot, and deposited it in the box.

There was a solemn air to the whole business. At 6:00, when it was time to count the votes, a crowd gathered in the room. They wanted to watch, they said. When they had voted in the municipal elections last May, many of them had spoiled their ballots in protest against the regime, but that had not stopped the electoral commission from announcing a stunning victory for the Communist Party. Now they wanted to see that every ballot was counted and accounted for.

The president of the electoral board emptied the box onto a table. The crowd drew close as the members of the board began the tally. There was some oohing and aahing as individuals spotted Xs by the parties of their choice, until the president called for order. He announced the total vote: 1,087, about eighty-five percent of the local electorate, although he could not be sure because so many people had immigrated to the West. An onlooker said he had noticed a ballot with two Xs somewhere in the pile, so the board counted the votes again. At last the president read out the results: a victory for the PDS, trailed closely by the SPD. No one applauded. Many people took notes. One woman said that she had come all the way from Hamburg. She had

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grown up in this neighborhood and had immigrated to West Germany before the Wall went up. "Now it is decided," she said gravely. "They have chosen freedom. There's no turning back now."

After the counting, the votes were put in plastic bags, which were locked into a suitcase. The president of the board drove off with them, escorted by a policeman, to the central electoral commission in the Palace of the Republic. There the final tabulation took place under the eye of the commission's president, Petra Bläss, a graduate student in German literature.

Perhaps the most important result of the election was not who won but the fact that it took place. For the first time since Hitler seized power in 1933, the East Germans selected representatives of their own choice. By placing Xs in circles on small sheets of paper, they restored legitimacy in a country that had gone politically bankrupt. Even if the country itself should disappear in the embrace of the Germans in the West, its people proved that they could take charge of their fate, stand up to tyranny, and decide for themselves about the politics they practice.

ROBERT DARNTON, professor of history at Princeton University, is currently a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin.

Yes, but it's not what you think.

IS ALAN GREENSPAN IMPOTENT?

By Robert Wright

America's newspapers have had trouble making up their minds about Alan Greenspan. Is the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board one of the most powerful men in the world or a quaint relic of a simpler time? One day his utterances are sifted by reporters for clues as to how the Fed will steer interest rates, and thus the economy. The next day the business pages carry stories about how in the new, global economy, American interest rates are determined by forces abroad.

And sometimes both happen on the same day. A page-one article in the February 21 *New York Times* reported that Greenspan, "the dominant force in economic policy-making," had said, as the headline put it, that the American economy's "SLIDE MAY HAVE ENDED." That judgment, the subhead explained, was "TAKEN AS SIGN THAT FEDERAL RESERVE WILL NOT LOWER INTEREST RATES." This, of course, is supposed to send a signal to the credit markets: anyone betting that the Fed would lower rates to spur the economy should think again, and the resulting reshuffling of money should nudge rates upward. That's why Greenspan's hints about the future belong on page one: such is his power that the logic of the market makes them self-fulfilling.

And, indeed, interest rates had soared the day of Greenspan's remarks. Yet the *Times*'s story on this upsurge, which led the same day's business section, didn't attribute it to Greenspan. Rather, bond dealers had "largely blamed concern that rising interest rates overseas would further increase the cost of borrowing in the United States." Fine, but then what was Greenspan doing on page one? How about a feature on Germany's Bundesbank instead?

This sort of tension was evident in many newspapers during late February, when Greenspan was particularly vocal and the world's credit markets were particularly active. By early March some papers seemed to have recognized the discrepancy and confronted it. The lead paragraph of a prominent *Times* story asserted that notwithstanding "the recent rise of West German, Japanese, and American rates in tandem . . . plenty of room still exists for the United States to control its own interest rates." *The Wall Street Journal* saw things differently. A few days later a headline on its front page declared: "FED HAS LOST MUCH OF ITS POWER TO SWAY U.S. INTEREST RATES." And this was no mere conjecture: "The past few weeks have dispelled all doubt: the Fed has lost much of its control over U.S. interest rates . . . to markets in Tokyo and Frankfurt." (Of course, this hadn't stopped the *Journal* from making a fairly big deal of Greenspan's remarks during those same few weeks.)

Interviews with various economists, along with a reperusal of several dust-covered economics textbooks, suggest that the nation's newspapers are fully justified in their confusion. Economic globalization is a subject of almost mystical murkiness, full of hopelessly entangled arrows of causality and lots of bald paradox. Nonetheless, a few shining truths emerge. Or, at least, a few shining untruths emerge. Although it is hard to make many categorical statements about what's really going on with the world economy, one can confidently say several things about what's not going on—and that's

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worth the trouble, since many of those things are widely believed to be going on.

A further value of listing the several basic misconceptions about economic globalization is that they do add up to a couple of megatruths. First, Alan Greenspan is indeed markedly less powerful than the Fed chairmen of bygone years, though not only for the reasons spelled out in the *Journal* and elsewhere. Second, there is a growing feeling that the world is due for a major economic restructuring, one that could rank in importance with the Bretton Woods accords of 1944 and the move to floating exchange rates in 1973. Regardless of whether real action on this front emerges from the April 7 summit of the Western economic powers, the idea will likely be very much in the air. And rightly so.

PAINTING OF ALAN GREENSPAN BY ORI HOFMEKLER

Misconception No. 1: That the world's interest rates have been converging. The reason for believing that the Fed's power has diminished is that these days money flows freely across national borders, seeking the highest rate of return. Suppose, for example, that the Fed tries a classic monetary stimulus: it increases the supply of dollars, which should drive down American interest rates, which should encourage American corporate investment as well as home-buying, car-buying, etc. This works fine if the United States is the only country in the world. But in a global conomy, American capital won't stick around earning low interest. If American interest rates sink, astute investors convert dollars to yen or marks and invest in higher-yielding foreign bonds. This outflow of capital should continue until it has brought foreign interest rates down a little and American interest rates back up a little, and the two are back in line. So in the end, much of the Fed's effect on interest rates will be outside American borders. One pedagogically useful (if technically arguable) way of looking at it is like this: rather than increase the American money supply by a large fraction and lower American interest rates a lot, the Fed will have increased the world money supply by a small fraction and lowered world interest rates (including American) a little.

That, anyway, is the theory. But it encounters empirical complications early on. For this scenario seems, at least superficially, to imply that as capital markets become global, national interest rates will converge into a single universal rate. Yet the opposite has happened. U.S. and Japanese interest rates, for example, stayed fairly close to one another during the late 1960s and early 1970s, back before each day's newspaper carried a story about economic globalization. But by the late seventies the two rates were starkly divergent, and by the late eighties the gulf was immense, with the American prime lending rate more than double the Japanese.

Misconception No. 2: That the truth behind Misconception No. 1 is good news for Greenspan. Some people who know that Misconception No. 1 is a misconception insist that this fact spells doom for the economic globalization hypothesis. The difference in national interest rates, they say, means that each nation's money market really is separate, with the cost of capital determined by indigenous supply and demand.

Nothing could be more wrong. The difference between Japanese and American interest rates during the late 1980s basically reflected low expectations about the dollar's future value. If a Japanese investor is going to buy a three-year bond denominated in dollars and he expects the dollar to depreciate by half against the yen over that period, you'll have to pay him twice as much as he could get on a Japanese bond. Note that this will be the case even if capital markets are fully global: there will be a convergence not of national interest rates per se, but of national interest rates *as adjusted for currency expectations*. Economists refer to these as "expected rates of return."

The global convergence of expected rates of return seems to have taken place. Jeffrey Frankel of the University of California, Berkeley, has shown that, during the late 1970s and 1980s, as countries such as England, Japan, France, and Italy dismantled controls that impeded the outward flow of capital, financial markets

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became just about fully integrated. Virtually all of the differences among national interest rates can now be explained in terms of currency expectations. The best common-sense demonstration of this is that a bond sold in European capital markets but denominated in yen ("Euroyen") fetches almost exactly what a comparable Japanese bond sold in Japan fetches; the difference is all in the denomination, not in the particular capital pool.

The basic implication of Frankel's work—that persistent differences among national interest rates *don't* represent walls around each nation's capital markets—has been slow to sink in. *The New York Times*'s big early March story declaring Greenspan still formidable ("RATE MOVES: NO FIRM GLOBAL LINK") backed up its thesis that the United States can still "control its own interest rates" by noting that the United States had been "quietly going against the global grain for over a week." The story was referring to the fact that, as Japanese and German rates had gone up, U.S. rates hadn't. True, but—as the article itself went on to show—this had nothing in particular to do with Fed policy and everything to do with extraneous forces, such as doubts about the yen in the wake of Japan's stock market crash, and doubts about the mark in anticipation of German inflation.

Misconception No. 3: That the Fed, deprived of control over interest rates, can just as easily exercise other means of economic influence. Greenspan boosters, confronted with all of the above, assume a fallback position. OK, they say, maybe national boundaries are entirely porous: maybe the Fed has trouble influencing American interest rates much, and can never keep expected rates of return on long-term U.S. bonds any lower than the expected return on comparable bonds in other countries. But to precisely the extent that Greenspan can't control interest rates, he can control the currency exchange rate. Suppose, again, that the Fed expands the money supply. As we've seen, this will not, in the long run, dramatically lower American interest rates, as our Econ 101 textbooks promised. Still, as rates drop a little and capital flows overseas to seek higher returns, dollars swamp currency exchange markets; the dollar's value drops. That makes American goods more attractive to foreign buyers. So American exports rise, stimulating the economy—which was the Fed's original goal anyway.

There are problems with this scenario. For one thing, an exchange-rate stimulus is qualitatively different from an interest-rate stimulus. For example, the latter may spur investment by lowering the cost of capital, whereas the former may actually stifle investment, as a falling dollar enables American producers to sell more goods abroad without making any of the productivity-raising technological overhauls that slow sales might have led them to try. There are lots of other differences between the two stimuli, and economists argue about whether exchange-rate control is on balance inferior to interest-rate control.

Unfortunately for Greenspan, there are signs that this theoretical debate is largely moot. Among the many economic discoveries of the late 1980s was that a falling dollar didn't give nearly the boost to American exports that textbooks had implied it would. So apparently, to the extent that globalization channels American monetary exertions away from interest-rate changes and into exchange-rate changes, the Fed's stimulative impact is not just qualitatively changed, but diminished.

Can't the Fed, faced with a lowered bang-per-buck, just print more bucks? You could mount an argument in the affirmative. Presumably, after all, the time-honored nasty side effects of a stimulative monetary policy (e.g., inflation) are diluted roughly in proportion to the dilution of *positive* effects. So why not just pump up the volume? See Misconception No. 4.

Misconception No. 4: That the world makes sense. One big problem with a full-throttle monetary stimulus in a global economy is that the outcome can be entirely perverse. After the Fed pumps money into the economy, the value of the dollar should start to drop. So far so good. But if the world gets the idea that the Fed is going to *keep* pumping, then expectations of continued dollar erosion may set in. This, as we've seen, will *raise* American interest rates, which will slow down the economy, contrary to the Fed's desires. (Some economists say that if an expansionary Fed policy is paired prudently with a responsible fiscal policy, this perverse result can be avoided. More on that later.)

The world may have recently witnessed a perversity of outcome much like this, though not one directly of the Fed's making. Remember back in 1985, when James Baker, then treasury secretary, decided that the way to restore America's economic health was to cut the trade deficit by encouraging the weakening of the dollar, thus making American goods more attractive? In the view of some economists, such as Ronald McKinnon of Stanford, Baker's wish came truer than he had hoped. The dollar, given a downward push by the concerted effort of the Western economic powers, fell and fell and fell. And as the expectation of its further fall became ingrained, American interest rates began to rise even as Japanese rates dropped. Today these high rates are often called the most important cause of America's economic ills. But does Baker get blamed? No. Baker never gets blamed for anything. Rather, everyone blames high interest rates on the budget deficit.

Misconception No. 5: That the budget deficit is the direct cause of relatively high U.S. interest rates. You've doubtless heard this refrain and probably even (like me) repeated it with great self-assurance: to finance the deficit, we need to borrow more money than is available within our borders, so our interest rates go up relative to foreign rates—the better to attract foreign currency. But this doesn't make any sense. If financial markets truly are integrated, our thirst for cash should ultimately drive up global rates a little, not American rates a lot. There's no obvious reason for the deficit to create any gap between American and Japanese interest rates, or to expand any pre-existing gap. (And, of course, there should be *no* gap, deficit or no deficit, in expected rates of return, which will always converge in a global economy.) However aberrant our demand for, or supply of,

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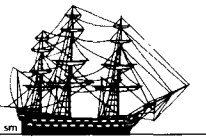

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money, this in itself should not affect the ratio of U.S. to foreign interest rates.

Not only has this corollary of globalization not yet dawned on many people; it hasn't even dawned on many people who spend their time talking about globalization. *The Wall Street Journal*'s big article announcing that "FED HAS LOST MUCH OF ITS POWER" contained this sentence: "America's budget deficit and low savings rates have addicted the U.S. to foreign capital, so foreign investors increasingly dictate the terms." That misses the point. In a global economy foreign investors dictate the terms of credit for *every* nation. Even Japan, with its globally envied savings rate, is "addicted" to foreign capital. If you don't believe it, try cutting the non-Japanese world's savings rates (i.e., the supply of capital outside of Japan) in half: Japan's interest rates will shoot up (along with everyone else's), and its economy will collapse. And whether that's more because foreign capital ceases to flow into Japan or because Japanese capital starts to flow out toward suddenly high interest rates abroad is ultimately irrelevant; either way, Japanese industry is utterly dependent on foreign savings. There is only one capital pool, and we're all stuck with it.

To be sure, a U.S. budget deficit can *indirectly* elevate American interest rates well above the global norm, if it creates expectations of future erosion in the dollar's value. And maybe our long-running deficit has indeed spawned such corrosive expectations. In any event, it is certainly true that a large, persistent budget deficit, and persistent national undersaving generally, are in several respects bad things. But they're not bad for the commonly invoked Econ 101 reasons.

Misconception No. 6: That recent globalization is far and away the main source of the Fed's weakness. *The Wall Street Journal*'s big article on Greenspan's growing impotence said his job is more difficult these days "mostly because of the ever-growing globalization of financial markets. With electronic speed, news and rumors flash from time zone to time zone." Yes, they do. But they've been doing that for about a century now. And the world's capital markets have been somewhat global since long before Greenspan was born. Back around the turn of the century, long-term interest rates on high-grade British and American bonds, for example, moved almost in lockstep. Investors have always been willing to earn money abroad, and the Fed has had to cope with leaky borders since it was founded in 1913.

To be sure, the leakage has varied over the century. War, in particular, has a way of impeding capital flow. And there's no doubt that, since the last world war ended, the flow has grown considerably. Further, much of this growth has indeed occurred fairly recently, over the past decade or two. For example, home mortgages and loans to small companies, which once drew only on national—sometimes local—savings, are now often bundled into packages and sold to the highest bidder, foreign or domestic. Also, there has been the aforementioned loosening of international credit controls.

Still, at least as draining for the Fed as all this capital integration has been the sheer shrinkage in the nation's relative economic stature. Since 1950 America's share of world GNP has shrunk from one-third—a fraction that would have given the Fed real clout even amid perfect capital integration—to one-sixth. Further, America's reputation during the 1950s for fiscal and monetary restraint—keeping inflation low—has evaporated, lessening the dollar's psychological force on the international scene. The title of "most reliably astringent economic power" was passed to West Germany a couple of decades ago, a fact that accounts for the Bundesbank's seemingly disproportionate influence on world interest rates in recent years.

Misconception No. 7: That all those international electronic blips are deeply meaningful and wonderful things. But what about the personal computers? What about the technological transformation of financial markets? Doesn't all this have some bearing on Greenspan?

Yes, but not only, and perhaps not mainly, of the sort you're imagining. Again, the ditches connecting the national capital pools were dug long ago—in the form of the telegraph and telephone, and even the postal service. Enough currency has for many decades flowed through these conduits to keep the levels of these pools from differing radically. What has gotten so much attention since the latter part of the 1970s is that the water has been flowing back and forth at record rates.

To put the matter less metaphorically: it isn't *net* capital flow—the bottom-line transfer of capital among nations as tallied at the end of each year—that has reached a historic high. As Paul Krugman of MIT has pointed out, net capital flow as a percentage of world GNP was greater just before World War I than it is now. And though it subsequently had its downs and ups, it hasn't grown breathtakingly of late. What has skyrocketed is *gross* capital flow—the total amount of currency that sloshes back and forth across borders, often sloshing back one day, or hour, or minute, and forth the next.

Now, much of this flow, to be sure, helps move the world's capital markets toward optimal integration, but a sizable part of the flow is *hyper*-optimal: there's more currency movement than is needed to keep the global market efficient, and the excess is counterproductive. So from the Fed's point of view, the recent profusion of blips is doubly bad news: it not only makes the nation's borders more porous; it also enshrouds the nation (and hence the Fed) in a fog bank. Exchange rates in the microelectronic age have been fluctuating at unprecedented speeds, and these changes in turn affect interest rates—which can in turn alter exchange rates. This volatile mutual feedback forces Greenspan to work amid deep uncertainty about the global forces with which his policies will have to reckon. So whatever power the Fed *does* still have is hard to exercise coherently.

Economic policy-makers are hardly the only victims of a turbulent international economy. As Krugman has shown in his book *Exchange-Rate Instability*, uncertainty about exchange rates gums up international trade, as firms become reluctant to abandon old, dying markets

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and to enter young, promising ones. And international finance doesn't seem to be working much better than international trade. It turns out that the currency expectations implied by differences in national interest rates are often wholly mistaken; these differences failed to accurately predict either the rise of the dollar during the early 1980s or its subsequent fall. Perhaps the best good-news, bad-news summary of the state of economic globalization is: yes, financial markets are so integrated that gaps among national interest rates reflect almost nothing except the conventional wisdom about future currency values; but, no, the markets aren't working well enough for that wisdom to be worth a damn.

It is ironic that all this recent turbulence, which so hampers the harmonious working of the global economy, is what has attracted so many reporters to the subject of globalization. The music has been playing for decades, but it took noise to get everyone's attention.

Misconception No. 8: That Paul Samuelson was right about exchange rates. Actually, although the new global volatility is mediated by, and often heightened by, computers, they are not solely, or even mainly, to blame for it. Microchip technology has worked synergistically with another, more crucial development: the world's adoption in the early 1970s of floating exchange rates. This change in international policy explains the otherwise perplexing fact, noted near the outset, that gaps among national interest rates have *grown* amid the continuing integration of capital markets. Under other exchange-rate systems—the gold standard at the turn of the century, or the Bretton Woods post-World War II fixed-rate system—currencies went years without changing in relative value. So interest rates didn't constantly gyrate, as they do now, in response to altered expectations about those values.

Back in the 1970s, just before and after the switch to floating rates, the air was thick with good theoretical arguments for them: Remember how compelling Paul Samuelson made the case sound in *Economics*? But now that floating rates have proved so destructively volatile, there is growing support among economists on both the left and the right for a return to some sort of fixed exchange-rate system.

The specific scenarios differ. Economists on the right tend to like rigid rules: a gold standard, say, or a "basket of goods" standard, in which each central bank is obliged to keep its currency at constant value with respect to a particular group of commodities (soy beans, one-megabyte memory chips, etc.). On the left, such autopilot schemes are dismissed as (*a*) typically conservative attempts to strip the government of all discretionary policy-making power and (*b*) naive and/or pernicious ploys to define inflation out of existence and compel the Fed to accept whatever unemployment level zero-inflation entails. Leftists prefer something more like Bretton Woods, or like the present European Monetary System: different nations' central banks keep their currencies at specific exchange rates, or at least within specific exchange ranges, but are allowed to devalue or revalue if an emergency, such as deep recession, arises.

Even many economists who balk at a return to fixed rates, or feel that the time for them hasn't yet come, do agree that other, perhaps looser, forms of international policy coordination are becoming urgent now that national borders are leakier than ever and global markets are so volatile. Something as unrevolutionary as the economic powers' conferring more frequently to make non-binding pledges toward general monetary and fiscal goals could prove healthful.

Misconception No. 9: That George Bush is doing a passable job. Lip service will be paid to the issue of policy coordination at the upcoming summit of the seven Western economic powers (the "group of seven" or "G-7"). Everyone will talk about the need for greater exchange-rate stability, and perhaps the participants will even set targets of unusual specificity. But the sort of structural overhaul that economists are starting to ponder may have to wait a while. One commonly mentioned reason is that the United States, notwithstanding its loss of economic power, remains a fairly big player (the biggest in the world, in fact) and yet is a paragon of unreliability. If, at the summit's adjournment, the time comes for the world's economic leader to swear its devotion to, say, precise exchange-rate targets, nobody in attendance will be able to keep a straight face.

A major source of America's unreliability consists of three words: "No new taxes." As Robert Solomon of the Brookings Institution has stressed, to whatever extent monetary policy *is* still potentially effective, the potential can be fully realized only in coordination with sound fiscal policy. (Thus, it is in the context of a persistent budget deficit that a loose monetary policy is most likely to spawn expectations of dollar erosion, and thereby have the perverse effect of raising American interest rates.) So as long as Bush's campaign pledge keeps the lever of fiscal policy untouchable, the United States cannot be among the credible leaders of a new international economic regime. And without the forceful support of the world's largest economy, any such regime will have trouble getting off the ground.

Don't be misled into thinking that by impeding economic coordination the United States will be protecting its sovereignty. Economic sovereignty of the kind America knew forty years ago is gone forever, assuming the world doesn't collapse into primitive economic balkanization (a fate that could be inadvertently brought on by economic nationalists—read: protectionists—on both the left and the right). Rather, the question is whether economic policy, having slipped beyond our exclusive control, should be (*a*) transferred to conscious international control—within which we would retain the degree of influence that our economic stature warrants; or (*b*) surrendered to the global invisible hand—which, at least during the 1980s, has been disturbingly chaotic in the exercise of its power. The choice between these two options isn't trivially easy (my unexpert sympathy, obviously, lies with option *a*). But their merits are for now beside the point. Until we have a fiscal policy, we won't have the luxury of choosing. •

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BULLISH ON BEIJING

By Arthur Waldron

When it comes to China, no one can accuse George Bush of being a political weather vane. Faced with a tempest of outrage over the Tiananmen Square massacre, he held himself to a carefully modulated response. Shortly thereafter (and in violation of his expressed policy) came the decision to re-establish high-level contacts with the Chinese leadership by secretly sending Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger and national security adviser Brent Scowcroft to Beijing in July and December. Then the president surprised many analysts by conducting a ferocious full-court press to defeat the bill, sponsored by Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, that would have protected Chinese students in America from deportation. By early March of this year the president was admitting that he wished "there would be more" response to those initiatives. But he apparently recognized no need to reconsider policy more generally. Far from it: on March 13 he told reporters, "We're right on track."

What lies behind this unusually steady and determined course? Principally, I would suggest, three deeply held convictions. One, American intervention can make a major difference in China's future, particularly if it takes the form of personal diplomacy. Two, the possibility of making such a difference is important enough to justify accepting substantial political damage at home. China holds primacy in Asia and has the potential to be a world superpower. Three (a carefully hedged but nevertheless detectable belief), China is somehow different enough to be partially exempted from the moral considerations that increasingly guide and constrain American policies elsewhere.

These beliefs are by no means unique to Bush. They characterize what may be called the "New China" (in Chinese, *Xin Zhongguo*, a common official synonym for the People's Republic) approach. In America they were articulated forty years ago by thinkers, mostly on the left, who maintained that the establishment of the People's Republic of China marked a new, definitive, and on balance highly positive step in China's twentieth-century evolution. Dominant in the academic world by the 1960s, this approach was adopted by the Nixon administration as the rationale for its opening to China, and with various modifications has formed American policy ever since. It is a policy in which Bush has been intimately involved at least since his service as U.S. envoy to China in the mid-1970s. That, most likely, is why it has such a hold on the president. And that is also why the fate of the New China approach as the guiding rationale for American policy may well rest with the success or, as now seems more likely, the failure of Bush's initiatives.

What would failure mean? Traditionally the New China approach has been opposed on three grounds. One, China's power potential is small, although obviously sufficient to cause trouble. Two, American influence in China is limited, and therefore the primary focus of America's Asian policy should be elsewhere (Japan is the usual suggestion). Three, there is little in China's political or philosophical tradition (which stresses virtue as the basis for rule) that justifies suspending human rights considerations when dealing with it. If the energetic Bush initiatives do bear meager fruit, this line of reasoning may begin to displace the New China position in policy-making.

The first sketch of the New China view came from French Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, who hung a portrait of Confucius in his study. Their descriptions depicted the country as strong, organized, and both morally and rationally distinct from the West. But for our purposes the story of the New China approach begins in the war-torn China of the 1930s and 1940s. During that time, many of those who built or influenced the academic field of China studies passed through China, and the impressions they formed proved to be particularly important, since direct access to China effectively ceased between 1949 and the early 1970s.

The China of the Second World War was scarcely the Enlightenment dream. The Japanese invasion had laid waste to the country; refugees were everywhere; the economy was a shambles. But many of the Westerners who visited nevertheless found cause for hope. They had little use for the Nationalists, who still resisted Japan from the city of Chongqing, beyond the Yangzi

ARTHUR WALDRON, author of *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge University Press), teaches Chinese history at Princeton University and is the Hooper Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

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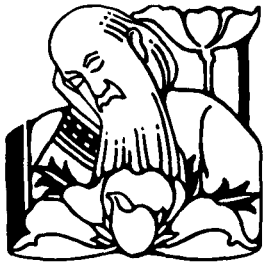

Faith and Intelligence:

Are They Compatible?

Among the well-educated the myth still circulates that religion is the preserve of the dim-witted, unlettered, and irrational. Yet recently *The New York Times Magazine* carried an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. From the Ivy League to Vanderbilt to Stanford, and among inquisitive people generally, there's an undeniable renewal of interest in the questions traditional religion raises and seeks to answer. This fascination is largely a result of the failures of secular substitutes for religion (such as positivism, hedonism, technological utopianism, egotism, Freudianism, and Marxism) to give abidingly satisfying answers to the truly significant puzzles in life: goodness, suffering, justice, love, death, and the meaning of it all.

The *Times* article discussed the NEW OXFORD REVIEW as part of this return to religion, and rightly so. We at the REVIEW are spearheading today's intellectual engagement with what Daniel Bell terms "the sacred." Among other things, we scrutinize the religious dimensions of the great events and issues of the past and present, and probe the wisdom offered not only by the Bible and Church fathers, but also by such diverse giants as St. Francis, Aquinas, Dante, Thomas More, Kierkegaard, Newman, Dostoyevsky, Chesterton, Bonhoeffer, Eliot, Silone, Maritain, Niebuhr, Solzhenitsyn, Dorothy Day, C.S. Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., Flannery O'Connor, Lech Walesa, Mother Teresa, Graham Greene, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Pope John Paul II.

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gorges and therefore virtually impregnable. The Nationalist government seemed "proto-fascist," as the Harvard China specialist John Fairbank wrote to an acquaintance working in the State Department. But they saw in the increasingly powerful Communist Party an organization that, by blending Marxism with elements drawn from traditional Chinese culture, could create a strong and united China that would be able to take its place both in the country's proud historical tradition and in the world. The belief that this process had actually gotten under way after the 1949 revolution gained greater and greater credence in left-leaning intellectual circles until, by the 1960s, it verged on being a consensus.

All of this, of course, was almost entirely at odds with official interpretation and policy. America and the PRC had become estranged shortly after the Communist victory in 1949, as initial American plans to deal with the new regime were rapidly superseded by nonrecognition of Beijing and political, economic, and military support for its rival on Taiwan. The reasons for this American-PRC estrangement are complex, and the explosive political debate at home over "Who lost China?" was certainly one of them. But even in the 1950s American diplomacy was not entirely irrational. Recent scholarship is beginning to make clear both the objective basis and the logic of the China policy laid down in the Eisenhower administration. From the 1950s on, the American government's information about China, the product of a sustained intelligence effort mounted from Hong Kong and Taiwan, was good. The picture obtained from this effort and from informal contact was of

The Lost Generation

BEIJING

The pseudonym he chooses is George—for George Bush, whom he thanks for preserving Sino-U.S. relations. Unlike Chinese students in the United States, many Beijing students worry that noisy U.S. protests against China's repressive policies could backfire, perhaps leading to a ban on overseas studies. George, a graduate student at China's Technology University, is a product of Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy. He likes to wear a Princeton T-shirt that an American friend gave him. He prefers the Beatles and Hemingway to *The East Is Red* and the works of Mao. George's hope in life is to go to the United States to study.

Last spring, when thousands of students started marching to Tiananmen Square, George thought there was little hope for a successful popular rebellion. But by May 4, the seventieth anniversary of China's first democracy protests, he was swept up by the huge numbers. Wearing his Princeton T-shirt, he sat with his classmates singing Russian revolutionary songs. His department's Party leader even joined in. There was an exhilarating sense that through the people's sheer willpower, China might really become a more open and democratic country.

After Tiananmen Square, George, like other students, wrote a report supporting the crackdown for his school's Communist Party leaders. "It made me sick," he says, "but I had to do it." One of his classmates was crushed by an armored personnel carrier. Another was just released from the hospital after recovering from a gunshot wound. But nobody mentions that night to him, or asks about his experiences. "What's the point in getting things stirred up?" says George. "We've learned no student movement means anything here."

With the help of a propaganda book called *56 Terrifying Days*, each student wrote a required account of his activities for each day of the movement. Students were given three chances to report everything they did; if the third version was still unacceptable, they would get black marks in their Party files. Those files, called "*dangan*," follow citizens for life: black marks mean a bad job, even possible banishment to far-flung, undeveloped parts of the country after graduation. But unlike former political campaigns, this time nobody rats on friends; nobody even mentions that their Party leader was in the square. He stands at the front of the classroom praising the students for their restraint. "Nobody went to the square," he says. "Your attitude was correct."

The authorities have imposed a mind-numbing program of political indoctrination. On top of the usual required heavy dose of politics—including history of the Communist Party, Marxist philosophy, history of the Chinese revolution—the weekly political study session includes lectures and small group discussions on the "quelling of the counterrevolutionary rebellion." In recent years, as Deng policies stressed pragmatism and economic efficiency, politics courses had become less and less important. Now students must score well in them if they want to get assigned good jobs by the state.

Though students are forced to publicly renounce the movement, they find ways of resisting. When George's department Party chief showed students a propaganda movie about the Nationalist era, students hooted and cheered when Chiang Kai-shek, supposed to represent the epitome of evil, conceded to a dialogue with demonstrating students, then used only water cannon to disperse the crowd. Qinghua University, China's most prestigious science institute, also showed students propaganda films with the hope of inculcating a bit of the spirit of hard work and plain living that the Communist revolutionaries lived by in the Yanan guerrilla base some fifty years ago. Instead, the students started cheering when a Nationalist soldier in one old film began beating a Communist agent.

In discussion groups each student is expected to explain why the government was right to smash the student movement. To avoid having to speak, one group of students at Beijing University cleverly asked the blue Mao-suited Party cadre running the discussion to reread the speech being discussed—so they could catch each important point, they said. But most students play the game, mouthing the lines they read in *People's Daily*. "We have to speak," says Xiao Zhang (a pseudonym). "Otherwise the leaders will say we have ghosts in our hearts—that there's something wrong with our thinking."

Xiao Zhang and his classmates endure a bleak nightly routine. Wearing five or six layers of clothing, they trudge across campus through biting winter winds to study in a bare, un-

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a highly repressive state, sometimes reckless, repeatedly shaken by political crises, perhaps suspicious of the U.S.S.R. and yet not particularly receptive to the United States or the West. American policy was therefore twofold: containment, plus pressure designed to split China away from its Soviet alliance.

But in the 1960s and early 1970s, both such American policies and the facts on which they were based came under increasingly vigorous challenge from intellectuals. For example, despite compelling evidence from refugee and official sources, the reality of the great famine of 1959-61, in which tens of millions died, was almost uniformly denied by China specialists, who instead argued that the People's Republic had eliminated hunger for the first time in Chinese history. Even when abuses such as "thought reform" were admitted, they were often implicitly justified by the invocation of Chinese traditions of ideological unity, differing conceptions of individual rights and freedoms, etc.

The view presented China as a country that was good if understood in its own terms, terms that were morally different from but equivalent (if not superior) to our own. The problem was that China was frequently misunderstood. And so this view called for extreme sensitivity in dealing with China: we should seek to understand, and never to impose. To apply our ideas of "human rights and legal procedure" was wrong; to do so risked sitting in inappropriate judgment "on a largely unknown country from a great distance." Our diplomacy had to be sensitive to China's amour propre and sense of place (what scholars called "The Chinese World Order").

heated classroom. By nine they return to their dorm rooms, off an unlit hallway. Their cluttered, filthy concrete cubicles are just big enough for four bunk beds and a table. Cigarette butts and squashed food litter the floor. At 10:30 students receive a fifteen-minute warning; clutching tin pails, they rush to wash their faces and feet. Because there is no hot water in the dorm, it's far too cold to take showers every day. At 10:45 authorities pull the switch. There is no more electricity in the building for the night.

But students don't accept authority as readily as they once did. "Lights out is when the dorms come to life," says Xiao Zhang. "Everyone pulls out their shortwave radios and the rooms buzz with talk of the latest changes in Eastern Europe." When Voice of America reported that Nicolae Ceausescu had fallen, he and his friends threw bottles out their windows in celebration. It was a bold act. Since the words for little bottle, "*xiao ping*," are a homonym for Deng Xiaoping's name, the message was clear to all who heard the glass tinkling on the frozen ground outside. The university's Party leaders subsequently posted warnings in dorms that announced: "Anybody who breaks bottles will be dealt with severely."

Eastern Europe has provided a spark of hope for China's demoralized students. But nervous campus authorities have stepped up surveillance, and students know that tens of thousands of troops are still poised at the edge of the city. Late last year three students at Qinghua University killed themselves, jumping out the windows of their dorm buildings. Two others have tried. Terrified that the deaths might stir up protests again, university authorities quickly spread the word that the suicides were love-related. But one student chose October 1, China's National Day, to jump, suggesting he had a desperate political message to deliver. Xiao Zhang says glumly, "It will be ten years before we can have any freedom again. I have no real hope anymore."

Beijing University, the traditional heart of China's democracy movement, has been labeled a "disaster area" by Party leaders because of the deep-seated resistance to Party propaganda. Following Ceausescu's downfall, students posted a hand-scrawled "big-character poster," or *dazibao*, describing him as a lost dog looking for the other three dogs named after China's top leaders. "If anybody finds these dogs," the sarcastic poster said, "please call 890634." The number represented the date of the June massacre. The university's president was replaced by a conservative economist, Wu Shuqing, who led a witch-hunt to root out rebellious students and, more important, teachers who had participated in the movement.

One young teacher, who calls herself Susan to avoid identification on the phone, was under investigation for some eight months after June. At irregular intervals, she was called in to sit across the table from three teachers from her department, all Party members, answering their stern questions as if she were a criminal. At first she denied that she had participated in pro-democracy activities—until one day one of her questioners produced evidence that she had attended a meeting of young teachers supporting the students. "We cannot protect you," the teacher said angrily. "If you confess, the Party will be lenient." Her worst "crime," she assumes, was talking occasionally to foreigners about what she saw on campus. In China, that could be called treason. So far Susan has not been punished; but she worries that authorities are watching her carefully and that she still could be fired.

A new educational policy is restricting study in the West. The State Education Commission in February issued a regulation requiring graduates to "serve the country" for five years before being allowed to study overseas. Universities last year began sharply limiting the number of students who could take the TOEFL English proficiency test needed to enter most U.S. schools. This year George's school announced that graduate students cannot take it at all unless they have relatives overseas. To discourage students from wasting days lining up for the limited chances to take the test, Qinghua University officials didn't announce the place of registration. Panicked students lined up anyway in random spots around the university. The final announcement sparked a chaotic stampede from all over campus. One of the students who recently jumped to his death carried a notebook with the words "TOEFL, TOEFL, TOEFL. CONFIDENCE, CONFIDENCE, CONFIDENCE" etched on the cover.

DORINDA ELLIOTT

Dorinda Elliott is Beijing bureau chief for *Newsweek*.

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Associated with such views about China's internal developments, and also based on recollections of the 1940s, was the belief in a "lost chance in China." American writers such as John S. Service and Barbara Tuchman maintained that the Chinese Communists had wished to establish good relations with the United States, only to be rejected. In its most comprehensive form, the "lost chance" became a complex counterfactual analysis that suggested not only that good relations with China might have been secured earlier, but also that such good relations might have secured a more humane China. As Service, a China-born diplomat forced out of the State Department in the McCarthy period, put it: "Mao's China, having come to power in a different way and not thrust into isolation by a hostile West, might be quite a different place." In sum, the United States had misunderstood China and, in doing so, had misunderstood its own interest as well. Such views were at odds with our government's views and are increasingly doubted by scholars today. But in the 1960s, with Vietnam in the background, they became broadly accepted in the intellectual community.

And ironically enough it was to exponents of these views, rather than to its own experts, that the Nixon White House turned as it formulated the China initiative. In *White House Years* Henry Kissinger sweepingly dismisses the official understanding of China up until his arrival: "For twenty years U.S. policy-makers had considered China as a brooding, chaotic, fanatical, and alien realm difficult to comprehend and impossible to sway." Somehow Kissinger knew (as Voltaire had?) that China was in fact rational and accessible, provided one adopt the right interpretative tack. So Kissinger and his staff read "books by Edgar Snow, Ross Terrill, Dennis Bloodworth, John Fairbank, C. P. Fitzgerald, Stuart Schram, and André Malraux"—varied authors, some genuine scholars, others little more than journalistic "friends of China," but all far more upbeat about the People's Republic than the official American view had been.

The reading had its effect. Although in *White House Years* Kissinger dismisses as "well-meaning but woolly" the pro-China groups that were so influential in the 1960s, his own emotional approach was more like theirs than he knew. Both were in awe of China. When in early 1971 the message arrived from Beijing approving Nixon's visit, Kissinger delivered it to the president with the words: "This is the most important communication that has come to an American president since the end of World War II." Kissinger's reactions to travel to China were also like those of the "friends of China." In the summer of 1971 the national security adviser and a delegation of radical American students made separate but overlapping visits to China. Here is how the students described the almost mystical experience of crossing the border from Hong Kong:

> Now, first foot on the bridge, walk across slowly, halfway there—we were in China! There could have been brass bands to welcome us and we never would have noticed; the thrill of simply thinking "I'm in China" absorbed us all.

Now compare Kissinger, rejuvenated as he enters China by air from Pakistan a few weeks later:

> Only some truly extraordinary event, both novel and moving, both unusual and overwhelming, restores the innocence of the [childhood] years when each day was a precious adventure defining the meaning of life. This is how it was for me as the aircraft crossed the snow-capped Himalayas, thrusting toward the heavens in the roseate glow of a rising sun.

In effect the administration of the strongly anti-Communist Richard Nixon had adopted the romantic view of the People's Republic developed by the academic left. The president, who as a candidate a dozen years earlier had hammered rival John Kennedy for alleged willingness to abandon the Nationalist-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu to the Communists, now waxed sentimental over the possibility that his daughter Tricia might be able to spend her honeymoon seeing the "great cities and the people" of China. This astonishing intellectual convergence was sustained at its peak for a few years in the 1970s. China cooperated, confirming for the steady trickle of visitors on carefully orchestrated tours just how much and how positively it had changed since 1949.

But the convergence could not last. Even as the official consensus on China and China policy was solidified through the Ford and Carter administrations, the academic view began slowly to shift. Following the Nixon breakthrough, scholars and journalists (many of whom had also been to graduate school and thus absorbed New China ideas) were able to go to the People's Republic. What they found on arrival was that the New China model could not survive long exposure to Chinese reality. The Belgian sinologist Simon Leys's 1974 volume, *Ombres Chinoises*, demolished the mythology about China. In 1982 long-serving *New York Times* correspondent Fox Butterfield published *Alive in the Bitter Sea*, a deeply pessimistic picture of life in China. Scholars began to question the whole analytical approach that Thomas Metzger and Ramon Myers, in *The Washington Quarterly* in 1980, called the "revolutionary paradigm." Like their antecedents in the 1940s, Americans living in China began more and more to identify with dissidents and criticize the Chinese government.

As long as China continued to reform, however, the national consensus on China policy held together. We might have no New China today, optimists said, but it was coming tomorrow. This last illusion died on June 4, 1989. The outpouring of indignation from the academic community after Tiananmen Square indicates, for intellectuals at least, the end of the road for the New China paradigm.

The American government's official reaction was different, as the Bush diplomacy demonstrates. But why? And for how long can it be sustained? Psychologists suggest that the first reaction to a tragedy or grievous setback is denial; social scientists have documented that

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the failure of prophecy can lead not to its abandonment but to its reassertion. The decisions to send Scowcroft and Eagleburger seem broadly to fit this pattern. China policy has gained much realism and sophistication since the sometimes starry-eyed days of Nixon and Carter. Nevertheless, post-Tiananmen Square diplomacy had a certain aura of denial and unawareness. In the months since the secret trips, we have learned something of how the policy was made. Evidently neither the lower levels of the State Department nor the professional staff of the National Security Council originated it. Like the initial Nixon initiative, the Bush decision came not from those charged with making China policy, but from the very top, presumably from the president himself.

It was Bush, apparently, who decided that instead of keeping a cautious distance after Tiananmen Square, the United States should try actively to influence events in China. And it was evidently the president who, on the basis of information suggesting that the Beijing situation was ripe for change—that Prime Minister Li Peng might resign, that astrophysicist Fang Lizhi might be given safe passage abroad from his refuge in the American Embassy—decided on the high-stakes gamble of the Scowcroft mission. But he clearly had strong support from authors of previous China breakthroughs, among them Michel Oksenberg, a professor at the University of Michigan who helped plan Carter's recognition of Beijing, and most important, Nixon himself.

In a memorandum Nixon circulated shortly after his return from a trip to China last fall, he made an analogy between the promises and the difficulties of the present and those his administration confronted. The Tiananmen Square massacre, though appalling to him, did not change his estimate of China's importance. It was still "a nuclear power." With Japan growing ever stronger, "a strong, stable China with close ties to the United States is essential to balance the power of Japan and the Soviet Union in East Asia." China still "has an indispensable role to play in the maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region." "China inevitably will become a major economic power," and so on. The need in American policy, Nixon stressed, is for the same kind of boldness he showed in 1971-72.

Oksenberg, now one of the handful of American China specialists willing to support the president, accompanied Nixon on his trip and went to the informal White House dinner on their return. In a December 13 *New York Times* op-ed piece titled "WHY BUSH IS RIGHT ON CHINA," he argued along lines similar to Nixon's: China is indispensable both geopolitically and in Asia's regional politics; U.S. failure to move has risked letting Beijing slip "into a position of dangerous isolation."

In addition to such foreign policy arguments, we have been hearing special pleading based on China's unique cultural traits. In January John Fairbank explained in *The New York Times*, apropos the Pelosi bill: "It isn't the students as such that bothers [the Chinese leaders]." Rather, it is concern about loss of face if Congress passes a law.

Fairbank is liberal, and Oksenberg is a Democrat, but otherwise the supporters of the president's position are mostly conservatives like Nixon. As such, they are heirs to those who opposed the New China approach when it was first created. On the other side of the division (in addition to many other conservatives) are scholars who once sympathized with the PRC but now condemn the Chinese government and work with dissidents. This is one of the ironies associated with the New China approach. *The Nation* publishes articles condemning Beijing, while the Heritage Foundation circulates an "Executive Memorandum" and a "Backgrounder," which, with qualifications, support the administration's policy.

Meanwhile, the validity of the New China approach is being tested as never before by the Bush initiatives. The president stands by his policy, and the administration explains its failure so far as the product not of a fundamental misjudgment but rather of capricious international developments (the Romanian revolution and the invasion of Panama in particular). The direction of policy will not change: thus the White House will apparently recommend renewal of most-favored-nation status for China in June.

The president is looking less and less like someone creating change and more like a political hostage, as Beijing almost daily tightens its grip on its people and turns up the volume on attacks on the West. The issue today is not whether a stable and unified China would make an important and positive contribution in a whole variety of ways. No one doubts that it would. The problem is that no such China appears to be forthcoming.

The years ahead will likely find China not helping to solve problems in Asia, but rather creating them. The crisis in Hong Kong will almost certainly deepen. Tension may rise between the two Chinas, as a wealthy and increasingly democratic Taiwan seeks its own appropriate international status while Beijing insists on unity. China's long-term economic prospects may deteriorate as central planning is reimposed, while the next succession crisis could bring regional or civil division. There are reports of more unrest in Tibet. The people of China are almost certainly as dissatisfied with their government as the Czechs or the Poles were with theirs, and though China differs from Eastern Europe in certain key respects, nevertheless a Romanian-type explosion is not to be ruled out.

Under such circumstances, how appropriate is it for the U.S. government to follow a policy of active and top-level involvement in pursuit of the New China chimera? Wouldn't quiet watching and waiting, with diplomacy handled by our ambassador and not special envoys, make a lot more sense? Clearly we need a new paradigm, one that says China is not as stable as we thought or as amenable to our influence, and is as likely to be a minus as a plus in international relations. Those analysts whom Kissinger dismissed twenty years ago for believing China was "difficult to comprehend and impossible to sway" may yet turn out to be close to the mark. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

New Wave, Old Tricks

White people who see a black film along with a predominantly white audience are not getting the full experience. Phrases, references, customs unfamiliar to whites are recognized by a black audience, particularly if it's a young audience watching a picture about the young. Amid such companions, I feel as if I were watching a film that has passages in a foreign language: the audience—by its reactions—adds the necessary subtitles.

To see such a film with the (unwitting) aid of the audience is to see how black people have shaped some prevailing conventions of white society to suit themselves. The conventions of the high school picture, for instance. I've just seen a black high school picture, **House Party** (New Line), with a young black audience and have heard the reactions to courting customs, rap music, party disc jockeys, and—more grimly—to white cops patrolling a black neighborhood in a squad car. Admittedly I'm comparing black high school pictures with white ones, not firsthand experience but screen experience; still, if there's fantasy in both groups of films, each group is fantasizing in its own way. I left that silly little picture with a sense that I knew less about blacks than I thought, and with a heightened hunger to know more.

Also I was chastened. One clearly discernible attitude among whites, including some of those concerned with racial equality, is that though culture has been a white province, blacks are now worthy to be admitted. This in spite of the fact that some elements in American culture, especially in music, are black contributions. In the film world, this new welcome-to-the-club attitude arises partly because of money. Blacks have long been a significant section of the general audience. (Twenty years ago a prominent Hollywood director told me that a film could not be a success if it didn't attract black people.) Now black films themselves—Spike Lee's in the van—are earning big profits, so now there's a black New Wave.

A recent film festival that showed several black pictures was combed over carefully by distributors—white, of course. But partly we can sense the attitude among whites that blacks have now matured to the point where we can allow them to make films in our studios and show them in our theaters. This perspective, which magnanimously "grants" blacks entry to the film community, reminds me of the way that men "granted" women the right to vote—an attitude that, fundamentally, feminism is still trying to correct.

If all the above is the case, then it's more important than ever not to treat black films patronizingly. The first one to appear out of the festival I mentioned is that high school picture, *House Party*; and—as film, not social evidence—it's an utter mediocrity. It was made by two brothers named Hudlin, Warrington who produced and Reginald who wrote and directed. Outside of the fact that they actually got the picture made, no small accomplishment, there's little cause for congratulation.

The story is minimal, the atmosphere is all. The film is about a high school boy who goes to a party against his father's orders. But more interesting than what happens is the fact that the boy has a tremendously high flat-top haircut (the audience laughed and applauded when they saw it, thus certifying it); and though it all takes place not in a ghetto but in a cozy black bourgeois neighborhood of private homes, the cops still harass black people on the street at night. (The audience loosed some obscenities here as if recognizing the harassment.) The direction is banal, the acting is at best enthusiastic. Perhaps if Reginald Hudlin gets to the position where he doesn't have to worry primarily about getting his film made, he may make a better one than this.

A note on the language. It's almost at the Eddie Murphy level. Let's say it's at the average cop-film level. I have no idea whether black bourgeois high school youths use this sulphurous diction, even in ordinary boy-girl talk. I note only that the white reviewers I've read don't think the dialogue is worth comment.

In Hollywood the means very often don't justify the end. Many a picture—thrillers almost always—start out soberly, realistically, with good situations or themes or both, and then plummet into the ridiculous. What is worse, the ridiculous stuff is usually trite. A film begins with some freshness and impact, gets desperate for growth and climax, and, forsaking invention, grabs at antique contraptions.

Two such slippages are in **Blue Steel** (MGM/UA) and **Bad Influence** (Epic). The first is about a rookie female New York

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Cinema Paradiso. *Like a huge slice of good lasagna. Memories of a filmgoing life in a Sicilian town. Dig in. (Reviewed 2/19/90)* **Flashback.** *A sixties hippie today and a straight FBI agent. The plot bends but doesn't break; the fun and rue are fairly constant. (2/19/90)* **Glory.** *A black regiment with a white colonel in the Union Army. Genuinely stirring notes are sounded in an extraordinary work. (1/8&15/90)* **Lonely Woman Seeks Life Companion.** *Perceptive directing and acting in this not-quite-comedy, from the Soviet Union, about a lonely woman in her forties and the man who answers her ad. (3/19/90)* —**SK**

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cop; she begins a relationship with a man who—we know very early—is a homicidal maniac. A moderately good springboard for a thriller, but the story soon becomes wildly unbelievable and ends in a trite shoot-out that goes past the incredible to the tedious.

Jamie Lee Curtis plays the cop, struggling to seem sturdy. (The most telling moment is when the camera watches her button her blue uniform shirt over a lacy bra.) The maniac is played by Ron Silver, last seen as the sexy Talmudist in *Enemies, A Love Story*. Silver's performance is more truthful than the script. The director and co-author was a woman, Kathryn Bigelow. This is her fourth film and the first I've seen. It's done slickly, with some luscious Manhattan cinematography by Amir Mokri; but if any special affinity between the Curtis character and the director was expected because of gender, it's not visible.

Bad Influence starts more intriguingly but becomes equally ridiculous. The theme is Faustian in a modern psychological sense: Mephistopheles can seduce you into doing only what is already in you to do. James Spader, the videotaper of *sex, lies, and videotape*, plays a drastically normal LA securities analyst who by chance strikes up an acquaintance with a smooth drifter, Rob Lowe. Little by little, the clever drifter takes over Spader's life, altering it severely, for not much more reason than that it's the drifter's nature to dominate and the other man's to be dominated. But before David Koepp's screenplay is an hour along, Spader finds himself in outlandish situations that he handles as if he had been in them all his life; and soon the frighteningly possible is replaced by Movieland's ludicrously impossible.

Spader seems a bit remote. In his earlier film the effect of a life under a glass bell was apt; here less so. Still, he's appealing. Lowe underplays quite scarily—until the screenplay gets mechanical. Curtis Hanson's direction is tidy, with more than a suggestion of Hitchcock—especially *Strangers on a Train*—and he deals especially well with the snatches of other people's lives that get caught on the edge of the main story as it barrels along. But that barrel leaks badly. •

Our Pasts, Ourselves

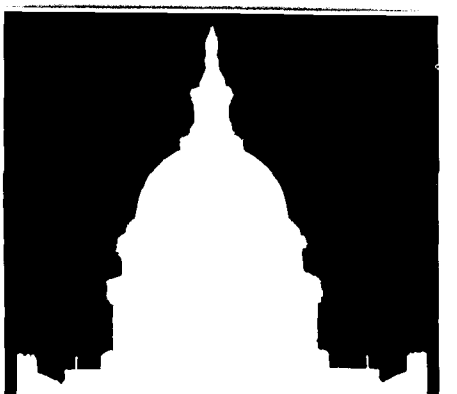
BY MARTHA NUSSBAUM

Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity by Charles Taylor

(Harvard University Press, 601 pp., $37.50)

When we borrow the language of philosophy and social theory to talk about ourselves, we often talk in an impoverished way. Trying to say what we care about, what makes sense of ourselves and our lives, we find ourselves using large abstract terms, such as "the good," "the right," "utility." The relation of these terms to the actual fabric of our lives, to our strivings and our commitments, is puzzling. Sometimes the terms seem too vague to connect with anything that really matters when we make judgments in ordinary life. This lofty vagueness has been among the standing targets of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, as in J. L. Austin's remark, "If only we could forget for a while about the beautiful and get down instead to the dainty and the dumpy." (Even within the analytic tradition, though, this call to concreteness has not always been heeded.) And sometimes the discrepancy lies deeper: not just in an abstractness that might be fleshed out, but in a deliberately reductive strategy, in a style of thinking that seeks to deny or to repudiate the diversity of the goods that people recognize in their lives, and the specific quality of their commitments to those goods.

Such reductive strategies play a part in many areas of social thought. They take a variety of forms, but common to most of them is the claim to have provided a more "scientific" view of the human being than is available in what is sometimes pejoratively called "folk psychology." One common strategy is naturalistic: the observer assumes a detached perspective and attempts to describe the human being as just one more part of the physical world of nature, using no language that would not be used to explain the behavior of other physical objects. Some such enterprises involve the reduction of all psychological and mental language to



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physiological language. Others continue to use psychological language, but in a mechanistic way, treating the human subject as a thing that is activated by stimuli in specifiable ways. In both cases, the view that human subjects have of themselves—which usually includes the notion that they are committed to certain ends as higher and more valuable than others, and that they love and cherish what deserves and claims their love—all this is treated as a sort of subjective illusion, or at best as a projection onto the "real world." From the scientific perspective, ethical value is not a part of the world of nature.

Some forms of utilitarianism in economics and public policy (and in the simpler philosophical accounts) are reductionist in a similar way. They hold that all our preferences are merely subjective, and so there is no reasonable way to make qualitative distinctions among them. Thus, the only notion of good that a science of economics can sensibly employ is one that refers to a simple aggregation of actual preferences or satisfactions of desire. In ordinary life, however, people usually consider that some things are so important, so claim our love and commitment, that they ought to be loved whether we currently love them or not; not to love them is a sign of obtuseness or callousness. And, conversely, people are usually aware that many of their desires are unreliable indices of real goodness, and would not stand up to critical examination. But the simpler utilitarianisms make no such distinctions. They consider that all evaluation is similarly unscientific.

There is, finally, a rather different type of reductionism, which has become popular in the humanities and the social sciences. This form uses the idea of "power" as its central notion and holds that all the ethical evaluations in which people ordinarily engage are simply the result of a dominant group's exercise of social control. Appealing usually to Nietzsche and to Foucault, proponents of such views insist that our experience of loving what deserves love, respecting what commands respect, is based on political illusion: when we attend to such norms we only repeat the slogans that have been set down for us by authority. Once again our ordinary distinctions between well-founded preferences and arbitrary ones, between what we ought to love and what we happen to desire, go by the boards. True scientific insight teaches us to jettison these distinctions as relics of our unsophisticated past. All apparent ethical persuasion is really political manipulation.

In his important and impressive book, Charles Taylor criticizes all these forms of reduction and simplification, arguing that they simply do not succeed in making sense of the ways in which human beings actually live and strive after what they love. He argues that we need to recover a sense of the qualitative distinctions that we make among our commitments, and a more complex picture of the diversity of the goods to which we are implicitly committed, if we are to understand ourselves well enough to confront the problems that face us.

Taylor describes his project as "an attempt to articulate and write a history of the modern identity"—that is, of "the ensemble of (largely unarticulated) understandings of what it is to be a human agent" that finds itself "at home in the modern West." He argues that we cannot even comprehend our unity and identity as subjects or selves without coming to grips with the complex set of goods to which we are committed. These commitments (such as political justice, the relief of suffering, the love of family and friends) are fundamental to our sense of who we are and what makes our lives hang together. By adopting forms of "scientific" social discourse that obscure or conceal all this, we become strangers to ourselves, we even mutilate ourselves. But a "close and patient articulation" of these goods makes their claim on us more evident, clarifying the nature of the choices currently before us.

Taylor focuses on three areas of ethical commitment and self-definition that are central to the western European tradition: on the development through history of a sense of "inwardness," the sense that we are beings with inner depths and spaces, and the connection of this with our emerging notions of individuality and selfhood; on what Taylor calls "the affirmation of ordinary life," or the development of the idea that personal relations, work, the household are spheres of deep spiritual meaning and engagement; and on the Romantic idea of nature as a source for the self. Taylor's aim is to articulate the history of each of these ethical ideas in a way that reveals their power for us today, their highly complex interrelationships, and the tensions to which these relationships give rise.

It is no surprise that Taylor has undertaken this massive project of retrieval and articulation, or that he has succeeded in carrying it through. During the past twenty-five years Taylor has been developing a distinctive position in political and social philosophy, a position that has fruitfully combined respect for reason and rigorous argument with attention to the richness of our discourse and history. Taylor has been an unusual figure in contemporary philosophy. He bridges the gap between the Continental and the Anglo-American traditions, so often mutually hostile and uncomprehending. He combines the latter's insistence on rigor, plain speech, and a close attention to the everyday with the former's respect for history and the history of thought. And, as he repeatedly shows, it is a natural combination: we need plain speech and good arguments to make sense of our history, but we will have poor arguments, and a deficient sense of the everyday, if we do not see to what extent our imagination and our language are the products of the complexities of history. Retrieving the historical context in which our ideas have evolved makes the nature of their claim on us clearer, and clarifies the alternatives.

Taylor has always insisted that we can describe ourselves as subjects of political and social action in ways that are more complexly human, more fruitfully connected to the ways that we actually make sense of our lives, than the languages of the social sciences are when they closely emulate the natural sciences. And he has shown that we can do this without relaxing the demand for rationality and good argument characteristic of the natural science tradition at its best. *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964), a meticulous and devastating critique of behaviorist psychology and its impoverished descriptive language, was followed by *Hegel* (1975), an impressive account of that then neglected thinker, which did an enormous amount to make Hegelian ideas available to the philosophical community.

These books were unified by Taylor's philosophical clarity, and by his interest in the self-interpretations of human beings in history. Two volumes of collected papers (*Human Agency and Language* and *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 1985) developed Taylor's account of self-interpretation and its role in the construction of an adequate discourse for the human sciences. Taylor insists that the attempt to describe the world of human life from a detached scientific point of view, disregarding the ways in which human beings themselves describe their lives and what has meaning in them, is both incomplete and incoherent: incomplete, because it omits so much of great importance; incoherent, because its conception of scientific rationality is not itself a feature of the universe as it is in itself, apart from human life, but a deep part of human life, whose claim to respect derives from its role within human history. It cannot provide us, therefore,

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with a detached external standard that can be used as a basis for repudiating other elements of our lives that have equal depth.

Taylor writes with forthrightness and clarity; most of his work is fully accessible to a non-professional audience. His work has a close relationship to that of several other political philosophers, such as Bernard Williams and Michael Walzer, who have defended a more "context-sensitive" and historically informed approach to problems of justice. But his anti-relativist position sets him apart from their (qualified) relativisms; and his insistence on deriving his positive conclusions from a close examination of history makes his work methodologically distinctive. Indeed, Taylor's thought should be far better known than it is, in fields such as literature, anthropology, the law, public policy, and economics, where philosophers distinctly inferior to Taylor are sometimes in vogue.

Taylor never offers simple solutions to complex problems; it is always difficult to summarize what he has said. His current book is *about* complexity; and its strength lies in its concrete illuminations, in the sureness with which, again and again, it brings to light unnoticed connections and deftly articulates the claim of norms too seldom acknowledged. The measure of its power is the exhilaration with which one recognizes, repeatedly, parts of one's own self that had been buried from view.

The first part of *Sources of the Self* contains the general philosophical arguments that motivate and justify Taylor's project. Here he argues cogently that a complex account of our goods and commitments is necessary not only for an adequate moral theory, but even for an understanding of the ways in which we move through time as continuous subjects. For human beings move through the world orienting themselves toward various goals; the movement and direction of their lives cannot be adequately understood without grasping the depth of those loves and commitments. "In order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good . . . [and] this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story." The artist orients herself around her striving after expressive fulfillment; the member of a family around the "rich joys of family love" and to efforts, over time, to fulfill the commitments exacted by that love; and most real people take their bearings from some complex combination of such aims and efforts. An adequate account of their identity cannot be given without telling how they are placed on the way to these goals.

Next Taylor argues that such projects and commitments need not be merely subjective. The most common forms of relativism and subjectivism have failed to establish that we cannot reason, and reason well, about what is worth loving, about what is higher. Such reasons certainly cannot be found outside human lives and human practices; but that was always the wrong place to search for them. Human life and human history give standards of assessment that we can draw on to show that the goods we value are real and objective enough. "What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs," he plausibly asks, "than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives?" Against the naturalist, who holds that all moral evaluation is mere subjective projection, Taylor objects that the contrast between the internal human viewpoint and the viewpoint of scientific detachment has not been adequately made out. The detached perspective has whatever merit it has as *part* of the internal human viewpoint. If it really were totally detached from human history, it would have no relevance to that history. But then it is not clear how the scientific point of view is in a position to call these other central parts of our experience into question. In general, the question that scientific explanation should be

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answering is, "what properties or entities or features our best account of things has to invoke." When we ask this question, however, ethical commitment will not be eliminated.

Utilitarianism is then criticized in similar ways, by showing that the cost of its abandonment of qualitative distinctions, and of the notion of commitment to the good, amounts to an inability to make sense of human practices. Taylor does not grapple here with the more subtle forms of recent philosophical utilitarianism (with, for example, the work of R. M. Hare, R. B. Brandt, or James Griffin, all of which make distinctions among types of desires and preferences, and provide for various types of evaluation and correction); thus the utilitarian philosopher will be bound to remain unsatisfied with Taylor's discussion. But against the simpler utilitarian views prevalent in economics and public policy, his criticisms are effective.

To the cultural relativist, who holds that all evaluation is either projection or in some other way bounded by local traditions, Taylor replies that the ethical outlook of traditional communities is itself, in almost all cases, inherently critical. Good history and good anthropology show that people do not cherish what they cherish because tradition or authority tells them to do so. They understand themselves, rather, to be striving after what is really good; and this is what explains the debate and the self-scrutiny that exist in every developed ethical tradition.

To the followers of Foucault and Nietzsche, and to the related views of Derrida, Taylor objects that the fact that some goods can serve power does not show that all must serve power: the case has simply not been made. The ethical nihilism of such views leaves us, moreover, with a world stripped bare of meaningful commitment, a world that could not possibly make sense of the way we view ourselves and our lives:

> Derrida doesn't have the saving inconsistency of Nietzsche, for whom there emerged, out of the uncompromising recognition of the flux, something which deserved unconditional affirmation, yea-saying. For Derrida there is nothing but deconstruction, which swallows up the old hierarchical distinctions between philosophy and literature, and between men and women, but just as readily could swallow up equal/unequal, community/discord, uncoerced/constrained dialogue, and the like. Nothing emerges from his flux worth affirming, and so what in fact comes to be celebrated is the deconstructing power itself, the prodigious power of subjectivity to undo all the potential allegiances which might bind it; pure untrammeled freedom.

But this, Taylor concludes, is an impoverished world, in which life is not worth living.

If it is difficult to give a summary sense of the richness of Taylor's general arguments, doing justice to the 400 pages of historical articulation that follow is impossible. Taylor's historical discussions are clear and economical, and based on remarkable scholarship. On Plato, on Locke, on the rise of the modern novel, on modernist poetry and painting, *Sources of the Self* concisely says original and penetrating things. It is rare to find this sort of philosophical history written so lucidly, without vanity or jargon.

Taylor begins his historical narrative by looking at the development, from Plato through Augustine and on to Descartes and Montaigne, of the sense that the self is constituted by inner space and depth, that it has a special sort of access to itself through inner reflection. He shows how this idea develops into the idea of radical reflexivity and self-consciousness. And, very revealingly, he shows how this emphasis on a special sort of subjectivity is intimately and unexpectedly related to the development of a conception of the person as the detached object of scientific study, and the related growth of political individualism.

Then Taylor traces the development, from the Reformation onward, of the idea that ordinary life has deep moral worth. He shows how the changing sense of the role of the divine in human life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transforms the sense of how and why ordinary life has moral importance, and where the sources of its value reside. The passions became not heuristic, but normative; and this, in turn, transformed political thought. The third major strand in Taylor's narrative is an examination of Romantic ideas about nature as source for the self—and of the connection between this idea and the further development of conceptions of individuality and sympathy in social discourse. Taylor shows that both Kantian autonomy and Romantic views of nature involve a critical reaction against the standard Enlightenment view of the subject: one involving a radical break with nature, one seeking the self in and through nature.

As an example of Taylor's historical work, it is useful to consider his arguments concerning "the affirmation of everyday life." In antiquity, and in most respects through the Middle Ages, the prevailing view was that activities of daily life, such as housework, child-rearing, work in a craft or a profession, even much of marital companionship, had no moral worth in their own right, were no part of what gave life its meaning and importance. At best, their role was to support the really important activities of politics and contemplation. At worst, they rendered the person who spent too much time in them unfit for such higher pursuits. Aristotle argues, for example, that neither farmers nor craftsmen should be permitted to be citizens in his ideal city—for, lacking the leisure for education and social conversation, they will lack the civic virtues.

Drawing on a rich variety of sources—historical, religious, philosophical, literary, and artistic—Taylor traces the rise, from the Reformation through the nineteenth century, of a different idea of the ordinary: the idea that the whole of life is "hallowed" and that "the substance of life" resides in the ways we serve God in a calling and in domestic life. (Elsewhere he also investigates the rather different origins of these views in Judaism.) Once this idea is widely accepted, in a religious or a secular form, it gives rise to a new political egalitarianism, which Taylor connects with the rise of the modern novel. Narrating ordinary lives in such a way that their daily particularities take on a rich significance, the novel provides a basis for viewing all human lives on the same footing.

Together with this idea, there develops a "growing idealization of marriage, based on affection, true companionship between husband and wife, and devoted concern for the children." And this leads, in turn, to a greater emphasis on the personal choice of a spouse, and in some cases to a greater tolerance for divorce. A fascinating account of the organization of domestic space in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows how this new ideal of the nuclear family generates a demand for domestic privacy, and a greater distancing of the nuclear unit from more remote kin and from neighbors.

Particularly revealing is Taylor's account of the subtle shift in the moral weight attached to the care and the rearing of children. It is not, he says, that people in other times and other places have not loved or cared for children. What changed, rather, was the sense of the importance of this relation for one's identity, and for the meaning of life; and the sense of the essential role of the nuclear family—as opposed to other relatives and neighbors—in fulfilling this moral imperative. Taylor argues that this sense of an absolute and unshirkable moral demand to care for children in this intimate way is something we have come

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to feel as a result of a particular Western history. We should not expect others who have not had this history to define their identity in precisely the same way, to have the very same attitudes to children and to domestic privacy—or the same agonizing moral dilemmas in connection with separation and divorce. Taylor holds that these social arrangements have enriched our lives morally; that we would not choose to discard them, whatever the tensions they generate; that we could plausibly argue—to an ancient Greek or to a contemporary person whose cultural traditions contain no analogous norm—that there may be something missing from their lives, something that we are right to affirm as among the "central human fulfillments."

In a sense this is familiar material; these changes have been investigated by historians of the family, and such historians will probably find little new information here. And yet, in the way that history and moral reflection are combined, Taylor's discussion is surprising, precisely because its material is so mundane in our lives. One recognizes oneself—and one is astonished that one did not see, before, how one was actually making sense of one's life, and how easily things might be otherwise.

In his final chapters, Taylor traces the legacy of this complex history in contemporary political and social debates. Owing to the diversity of the goods for which compelling claims can be made, debate—about, for example, tensions between ecological values and technological progress—is a complex and delicate matter. It is no use, Taylor argues, to ignore these tensions, or to pretend that only one of the two contending goods is important, or that all goods can be easily reduced to a single good. These tensions are sometimes tragic: sometimes any choice will involve a violation of something important. But turning away from them conceals the motives we have for doing justice to all the things we love, insofar as we possibly can. To deprive ourselves in this way is "to incur a huge self-inflicted wound."

In particular, we need to see more clearly the concrete tensions we face between the claims of universal benevolence and justice and the claims of individual self-expression, for these tensions color every facet of our lives. Taylor's history has shown that until recently benevolence was shored up by religious love and aspiration. He is not certain that it will be possible, without the belief in God, to sustain a basis for extending help to those who do not appeal to us, or to help our personal projects. *Sources of the Self* ends with a highly tentative move toward the recovery of religious sources of value—not in the sense of church authority curbing disobedience, as in Alasdair MacIntyre's recent work, but in the very different sense of a love of that which is "incomparably higher." For Taylor, this love gives point and motivation to other loves. He tells the reader that he has no arguments here, only "hunches"; and he leaves the reader with the question whether a secular humanistic morality can succeed in motivating benevolence and a universal respect for human dignity without "any religious dimension or radical hope."

What prompts these hunches? Taylor observes that secular humanistic visions of justice have not prevented the spread of a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness in human life. He also notes that such visions frequently seem insufficiently rich to sustain our love, since they derive their affirmations through a negation of the religious morality that preceded them. But the second criticism does not seem to apply equally to all secular ethical views: it does not apply, for example, to Kantian ethics, or to an Aristotelian morality based on ideas of virtue. It seems unfair, moreover, to blame secularism for the meaninglessness experienced by people who have ceased to believe in God. Surely Nietzsche is right that this despair is a pernicious legacy of that dependency.

Taylor's other hunch is that we now understand too much about what he calls "the murkier depths of human motivation" to have Aristotle's confidence that people who are raised with love, with material support, and with good education will be capable of virtue. But, once again, objections come to mind. Have those happy conditions ever been realized on a large scale? And what sort of evidence should we require before concluding that the human heart is radically defective, that it is insufficient to its own highest hopes? My own hunch is that the best work on the "murkier depths" of the human heart shows something rather different: that love proves to be, in the end, a more powerful source of motivation than hatred, and that even ugly childhood feelings of aggression, and guilt at one's own aggression, can frequently become powerful promptings toward benevolent action in adult life. (Such views have been powerfully defended in the work of Melanie Klein and Richard Wollheim.) Certainly Taylor has (as he says) no arguments against such views. So the discussion has barely begun. And one might ask, moreover, whether it is actually possible to turn to religious sources of motivation without also going in for religious authority, and putting that authority ahead of reason.

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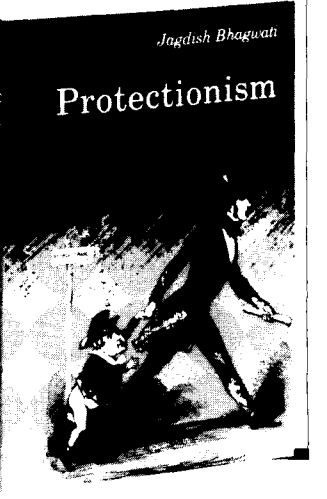

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The low likelihood of such an outcome, given our cultural arrangements, is yet another motive one might have for choosing the secular view, even if all else were equal.

Many questions are bound to be raised about Taylor's procedure. Most will concern, very properly, the concrete details of his history, which I have not adequately described. But there are general questions that must also be raised. Taylor devotes considerable attention to the absence of the history of political and economic structures from his history of our selfhood. Aware that he could easily be charged with offering an "idealist" account that subordinates these factors to intellectual ones, he plausibly replies that, although economic factors are indeed important, and are themselves essential to a more complete self-understanding, ideas do have their own power in history, shaping practices as they are shaped by them. He claims to offer not a complete historical explanation of what produced the modern sense of identity, but something more modest, an articulation of various visions of the good and their appeal.

Unfortunately, there are other objections that are less squarely faced in the text. One concerns the restriction of his account to the history of Western conceptions. Taylor articulates so much so brilliantly that it seems mean-spirited to suggest that his account is narrow. Still, if we want to know who and where we are—say, in the United States—an account of Western traditions will not suffice. The articulation of who "we" are and what "our" history is had better involve, for the purposes of moral and political reflection, some understanding of African, Asian, and Latino traditions. (The last is in some sense Western, but it is not included in Taylor's picture.)

There are three reasons for this. First, these traditions have in various ways made important contributions to the formation of the sense of self of most Americans and many Europeans. Take the example of the arts: this book, which devotes so much attention to the shaping role of literature and the other arts, describing figures such as Defoe, Trollope, Pound, Eliot, and Kandinsky as central actors, contains no reference to the blues or to jazz—which are surely, in Taylor's own sense, "moral sources" of enormous depth and power. How many of his readers, when they think about love or pain, owe as much to Trollope or Eliot or Holderlin as they do to Bessie Smith or Billie Holiday? And is the vision of suffering, joy, endurance—and justice—that unfolds in the searing, broken cadences of Holiday's last recordings any less worthy of close philosophical scrutiny than the forms of art and literature that Taylor does discuss, if what we are seeking is an articulation of the visions of goodness that have made us who we are? Related points could be made about other non-Western traditions.

Second, the fact is that a large number of our fellow citizens are members of non-Western traditions and define their identity even more centrally in terms of those traditions. Any account of a "we" in any modern Western nation had better show respect for "our" real complexity, and seek a broader understanding. I suspect that Taylor's careful attention to Voltaire and Rousseau would not satisfy even his own French-speaking fellow citizens in Quebec as a sufficient articulation of their identity.

Third, an inquiry broader than Taylor's would have value well beyond the boundaries of domestic politics. For many political problems to which the accounts of identity in this book have relevance—problems of global ecology, of hunger and poverty, of education, of gender justice—are increasingly being confronted in an international and multicultural way. Even if "we" North Americans *were* shaped only by Western ethical sources, and even if domestic social justice did not require any larger understanding, we would still need to do more to understand the larger "we" who will be deliberating about such matters.

In many ways, the self-recognitions engendered by this book do indeed promote that larger understanding. For only when we can grasp and articulate the specific contingencies that have fashioned our deep conceptions of the meaning of family life, or of romantic companionship, or of political freedom, will we be in a position to recognize that people from different traditions might not share exactly those conceptions. We will be likely to be less clumsy in dealing with them, more appreciative of, and less bewildered by, the evidence of their differences. Self-understanding is an essential prerequisite for sympathy and for justice. Still, Taylor might have done more to prepare the reader for the larger interpretive task that awaits her—and to have shown how its completion would enrich, in the ways I have described, both our understanding of others and our grasp of ourselves.

Taylor's account has another, related limitation. By confining his account to philosophy, to mainstream European religion, and to high culture, Taylor tends to omit, at many important points, the voices of the powerless and the marginalized, those cut off by gender or class or race from these forms of cultural expression. This is reasonable enough, up to a point: for the project is to study the ideas that have shaped us, not those that failed to have an impact. I am fully in agreement with Taylor that these intellectual traditions cannot be dismissed by asserting that they are merely systems of domination. They are much more than that, and obviously worthy of close scrutiny as valuable moral sources; to deny them this role is to impoverish our own possibilities. But there are other sources, too. They are less easily accessible to a historian with Taylor's text-centered methods, but they are powerful and deep: oral tradition, myths, stories, the self-understandings of women and oppressed people, insofar as these resourcefully reacted against and affected the cultures in which they lived.

Taylor would not deny this, I am sure. A compassion for the oppressed and a passion for justice are evident in every chapter of his book. But his methods do not permit him to reach very deeply into such lives. To take just one example: a story of the conception of the self in ancient Greece that bases itself on Plato and the philosophers cannot pick up much of what even an ordinary male Greek citizen thought and said—and hardly anything of what Greek women had to say about themselves and their identities.

Again, this simply means that Taylor has not told the entire story. It does not mean that his book is undermined, or exposed as a record of mere power-grabbing. His sort of Western-centeredness is altogether different from the unreflective ethnocentrism of the traditional undergraduate curriculum, and also from the militant ethnocentrism of Allan Bloom, because Taylor's account aims to show how traditional views can justify themselves through careful argument, and because all visions of goodness, in principle, are of interest to him, wherever they touch upon and shape human lives. In the current academic climate, where there is so much strident and ill-argued debunking of famous books and authors by appealing to ideas of power, it is refreshing to see a philosopher with Taylor's historical sensitivity, social compassion, and philosophical acumen argue against what is excessive in such approaches, and defend the practice of mining the dominant intellectual tradition for moral insight.

Still, such reflections lead to a deeper philosophical question about Taylor's narrative: to a question about justification. Once we recognize that our sense of self is made up of the complex and heterogeneous strands that Taylor's narrative disengages, where do we go from

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there? How, precisely, do we move from understanding to endorsement? There are really two questions here, closely related. First, how do we decide to reject a part of our current view of the good—say, one that is in tension with another part—if to do so will incur the self-mutilation that Taylor fears? Second, how do we deal with challenges to our own complex conceptions that come from other traditions of thought?

Taylor makes us suspicious of large general solutions to these problems. And yet he appears to commit himself to the view that at least some elements in the conception of good that he discusses can be defended as best for human life generally. He argues, for example, that the idea of universal respect for human dignity is no mere accident of our local history, but a way of seeing the world that can be shown to be good for human beings the world over, a necessary mark of any "higher" civilization. And in his early theoretical remarks he suggests a general view of how we should justify a conception of the good. The core of Taylor's account (he has given it more fully in a recent essay) is as follows. To show that an ethical view is a good and reasonable one for us to hold, we do not need to provide the sort of argument that Western philosophers ever since Aristotle have tended to favor as their paradigm of rational argumentation: that is, a deductive argument proceeding from premises that are true, necessary, and external to all history. The belief that only such an argument can validate an ethical conclusion, Taylor argues, is an error that has been at the bottom of many forms of skepticism and extreme cultural relativism in ethics. For many thinkers, when they find that such arguments do not appear to be available there, have too quickly concluded that no good arguments are available, that all ethical argument is a matter of mere power.

But, Taylor continues, there are good arguments of a different sort available in the ethical sphere: practical explanations of a view's merits that are fully internal to human history, non-deductive in structure, seeking coherence and fit between theory and our deepest and most indispensable beliefs about ourselves. (Here Taylor comes close to John Rawls's idea of "reflective equilibrium" as the desired outcome of a process of ethical reasoning.) In particular, Taylor argues, it is possible to show that a new view, B, is superior to an earlier view, A, by showing how B responds to tensions and problems in A and helps us understand why A got into difficulty—all this in a way that signals a genuine gain in understanding,

You deserve a factual look at . . .

The "Intifada"

Is Israel using excessive force to suppress it?

For over two years now, the "intifada," the uprising of the Arab population in the territories administered by Israel, has occupied the attention of print and broadcast media and has therefore been of concern to the public. Much of that concern has centered on the methods used by the Israelis to suppress this uprising. Television especially has left the impression that those methods are too harsh, that the Arabs in the adminisitered territories are subject to human rights abuses on a grand scale and that their civil rights are routinely violated.

What are the facts?

■ As a result of their brilliant military exploits in the Six Day War, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have gained a reputation of prowess and professionalism. It is therefore difficult to understand why the competent Israeli military have until now been unable to squash this uprising. One inevitably compares it with the "efficiency" of, for instance, the Chinese, who, at a cost of perhaps 4,000 lives, took care of *their* uprising in a single day; by the Syrians, who "settled" their uprising in the City of Hama by killing an estimated 25,000 of their own people and by leveling the city; or with the Iraqis, who dealt with their restive Kurdish minority by summarily poison-gassing entire villages.

■ There is, of course, little question that the IDF could easily have handled the intifada in the same "efficient" manner. Had they done so at the very beginning, it would in all likelihood have been the end of the whole affair. There would not have been years of turmoil, of extensive television coverage, of countless agonizing editorials in the media of the world, and endless denunciation of Israel in international forums. But Israel is a western democracy and is, of course, unable to act in this manner. The reason that the "intifada" has been allowed to drag on for so long is the almost incredible restraint by the IDF and their scrupulous concern about the lives and the properties of the Arab population.

■ The "intifada's" goal is not the creation of an Arab mini-state. This uprising is the latest link in the chain of the never-ending war of the Arab nations against Israel, the unchanging goal of which is the total destruction of the Jewish state. The "intifada" uses the techniques of street violence, by which Israeli soldiers and civilians find themselves under continuous assault, threatened daily by stones, Molotov cocktails and occasional gunfire. Faced with this never-ending provocation, the restraint of the IDF has to be admired. While every human life is precious, what is remarkable is the relatively small number of casualties—fewer than die during outbreaks of violence in Lebanon, in Kashmir, in Sri Lanka or in Azerbaijan, or during the drug wars in American inner cities. And this small number is reflective of the determination of the Israeli government to minimize casualties and of the forbearance and professionalism of the IDF.

■ In their effort to minimize casualties and injuries, the IDF have detailed and specific instructions on use of force and of weapons. For instance, soldiers are only allowed to open fire when fired upon. They are never allowed to fire into crowds; they are not allowed to fire if innocent bystanders could be hurt; they are not allowed to fire at fleeing attackers. In order further to reduce casualties, the Israelis continue to experiment with plastic bullets, rubber bullets and other non-lethal weapons. Automatic weapons are completely forbidden. If at all possible, nightsticks are being used instead of guns. The role of IDF soldiers in maintaining order and tranquility in the territories is made infinitely more complicated by their being confronted mostly by children, teenagers, and women, while the able-bodied men stay safely in the background, egging them on.

The "intifada" is a violent uprising, an extension of the unrelenting war of the Arab states against Israel. It has been allowed to go on for over two years, only because of the patience, forbearance and respect for human life and property of the Israeli government and military. The "intifada" cannot solve the problems of the Middle East. Peace in the area can only come about by face-to-face negotiations between Israelis and the Arab inhabitants of the administered territories. In a recent speech, Prime Minister Shamir stated: "Israel has submitted a logical, fair and just plan for the solution of the conflict. If Arab governments sincerely want to contribute to the solution of the conflict, to the elimination of violence, and to the achievement of peace, then they must use their influence on the Palestinian Arabs to dissociate themselves from the useless, destructive and hopeless ties to the PLO."

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not simply a transition from one authority to the next.

The test for this is found through historical narration. If B is really superior to A, it will be possible to tell a compelling story of the transition from A to B, an account showing progress in understanding; but it will not be possible to tell an equally compelling story in which the transition is reversed, going from B to A. Once all the relevant material is brought to light and articulated, the decisive considerations should be such that both sides will recognize their validity; and the movement from A to B is thus a move to preserve a deep part of what is common to both A and B, by removing a dissonance.

Taylor's book provides many compelling examples of such narration. He convinces the reader, for instance, that the progression from ancient Greek aristocratic conceptions of politics to a universal respect for human dignity is a progress in understanding that was generated by tensions within the ancient conceptions themselves (with their unarticulated acknowledgments of the humanness of women and slaves), and one that could not be reversed. "Once you grasp this possibility," he writes, "it can't help but seem prima facie right." Still, the general philosophical issue seems to me to need more extended and explicit discussion than he has given it. Granted that there is a real and urgent difference between progress in understanding and the imposition of political or cultural power, it is still not easy to tell the difference in particular cases. For power frequently masquerades as illumination. What criteria should we look for, whose lives, whose intuitions, whose interests should we consult, when we ask whether a new conception is a gain in understanding? Taylor's narrative tells us little about how to unmask pretenders.

Let A be the Aristotelian view that the "natural" situation of the human being combines capability with limitedness and vulnerability. Let B be the Augustinian view that our fundamental situation is one of sinfulness. To me, it seems most illuminating to narrate the story going not from A to B, but from B to A: people at some time come to realize that their basic situation is not original culpability, but capable finitude, and this is a gain in understanding. One can even describe such a development as prompted by tensions internal to the Christian view, since many early Christian views placed the stress on human helplessness and human freedom. Yet many Christians would find the actual historical transition, from A to B, the truly illuminating one—generated (as in Taylor's arguments for religion) by a sense that the Aristotelian view cannot explain all the ways in which life goes badly. I may strongly suspect that church power played the driving role here; but my opponent will reply that in this case power supported the truth. There are many ways to adjudicate this situation; the enterprise of justification does not need to collapse. But I do not see exactly which way Taylor favors, and how the developmental emphasis of his account of rationality will work in such cases.

Only a more extended account, moreover, will tell us how to assess tensions in our current set of ends, how to decide which are fruitful, which are the result of arbitrary and dispensable elements. And this becomes more urgent still if we wish to take in the entire human world. Taylor's account applies only to views that succeed one another within a continuous history. But many confrontations between views do not have this form. When members of two different traditions encounter one another, with subtly different ideas of freedom, of the meaning of family life, of nature, what structure can the conversation have, and what outcomes count as progress in understanding?

That more remains to be done is no surprise. For Taylor has taken on the most delicate and exacting of philosophical questions, the question of who we are and how we should live. He has shown the importance of the history of our ideas and conceptions for the sort of complicated self-articulation that we need in the further pursuit of the question. And he has made this an adventure of self-discovery for his reader. To have accomplished so much is an important philosophical achievement, which will considerably enhance the contribution made by contemporary philosophy to private and public life.

MARTHA NUSSBAUM is University Professor of Philosophy, Classics, and Comparative Literature at Brown University. Her most recent book, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, will appear this spring from Oxford University Press.

Meet John Smith

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman by Paul Mariani

(Morrow, 519 pp., $29.95)

As a bespectacled preppy, John Berryman was nicknamed "Blears," and it has never been easy to bring his poetic achievement into focus. His stature seems assured, yet who can recite a Berryman poem? One has a vague sense of the early *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, and of the *Dream Songs*, sprawling Cantos-like from the original 77 to the final 385. Perhaps, casting about, one remembers the start of the anthology piece, "Life, friends, is boring." But while his famous contemporaries—Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Delmore Schwartz—have begun to settle in the imagination, Berryman has remained elusive. Ever since he leaped to his death from a bridge over the Mississippi River in 1972, he has been changing shape in the mind as he constantly changed shape during his life. Even the existing photographs of him seem to be of different people.

By the time he died, Berryman had run through three marriages, an astonishing amount of alcohol, and several bookish careers—as poet, biographer, scholar, professor, and, for a few bad days after World War II, as an encyclopedia salesman. His imaginative life seems, in retrospect, a ventriloquist's search for an appropriate dummy. In his first major poem, he impersonated a seventeenth-century woman poet. Barely aware that Jews existed until he attended Columbia, he came to think of himself as an "imaginary Jew." The book he's famous for, *The Dream Songs*, is conceived as a sort of running minstrel show, with its hero often in black face. He was drawn to the great impersonators in literature: Shakespeare (whose biography he tried for twenty years to write), Yeats, and Stephen Crane. By calling his new biography *Dream Song*, the poet Paul Mariani implies that Berryman's life assumed the disguises, as well as the rhythm, of a dream.

His beginnings could hardly have been more anonymous. He was born John

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Smith in 1914, in rural Oklahoma, the result of a miserable marriage between a feckless, small-town banker and a schoolteacher who thought she deserved better. His father, John Allyn Smith Sr., drifted toward the Florida land boom when his banking career foundered. The Smiths opened a restaurant, the Orange Blossom, in Tampa in 1925, and closed it the following year when the boom collapsed.

The sordid events that followed have a film-noir feel. Mr. and Mrs. Smith moved across the bay to the Kipling Arms, where Martha Smith took up with the landlord, a dapper Georgian called John Berryman. One day Smith, who'd been drinking heavily, returned to the apartment building to find his wife with Berryman. When Mrs. Smith next saw him (as she later explained to the police) he was lying dead with a bullet in his chest and a revolver by his side. The police ignored suspicious details—no powder burns on the victim's clothing, for example—and ruled the death a suicide. But John Smith Jr. suspected a conspiracy, and for the rest of his life imagined himself Hamlet to his mother's murderous Gertrude. His father's death haunts all of his books, as in the poignant autobiographical lines of his late collection *Love and Fame*:

> Thought much I then on perforated
> daddy, daddy boxed in and let down
> with strong straps,
> when I my friends' homes visited, with
> fathers
> universal and intact.

Freed of encumbrances—for Berryman quickly ditched his wife—the couple took off for New York to try their luck. With new life came new identities. John Smith Jr. became John Berryman Jr.; his mother, Martha Smith, changed her name, for some reason, to "Jill Angel"; his stepfather became "Uncle Jack." The Berrymans placed John in the South Kent School, to match their social-climbing ambitions. Berryman was a nerd; he had good grades and a disfiguring case of acne. His single moment of athletic glory came when he blocked an extra point attempt with his face.

On scholarship at Columbia he came under the courtly influence of the poet and critic Mark Van Doren, who gave Berryman a model for being in the academy but not of it. Berryman dressed like a dandy, attended strip shows and speakeasies, and memorized the lyrics of 150 popular songs—a plausible source, so far unexamined, for the forms and the diction of his later lyrics. Upon graduation he won a Columbia fellowship to spend two years at Cambridge University, thus escaping from Uncle Jack and mother Jill, who'd hit hard times during the Depression. At Cambridge, Berryman cultivated a contempt for most American poetry and for all women, whom he found "monotonous" when undressed: the "ineffectual skin, two nipples more or less brown, a mat of hair, and two legs that coyly open on an odorous and impatient portal." He spent an hour with Yeats, got drunk with Dylan Thomas, and returned to New York, in 1938, with a beard, fine tweeds, and a clipped British accent.

After false starts in journalism and high school teaching, Berryman became what he despised, a college professor, with stints through the fifties and sixties at Princeton, Harvard, Iowa, and, tenured at last, at Minnesota. He was notorious for his sweating, spitting lecture style and for his capacity for drink. Once he repeated to a Wednesday class the lecture on Don Quixote that he'd delivered to the same students the previous Monday. He lost the Iowa job in 1954, when he came home after a bender, couldn't find his key, and tried to force the door. As Mariani tells it:

> Upset, and desperately needing to go to the bathroom, Berryman began shouting obscenities. But when the landlord refused to let him in, Berryman squatted on the front porch and defecated. Upset, the landlord's wife called the police and had Berryman locked up for disorderly conduct. He was outraged when the police began jeering and taunting him. And when several police officers exposed themselves to him, Berryman began screaming that they were nothing but "*homosexual* criminals."

Mariani doesn't specify the source of that last dubious detail about the police officers' conduct—it was, in fact, Berryman himself. He was relieved of his duties at Iowa two days later.

Berryman had taken the Iowa job when his first marriage, to the writer Eileen Simpson, was falling apart. He must have been hell to live with. Mariani is rather breezy about Berryman's three marriages and what he calls the additional "intimacy of fifty women," but the details of Berryman's brief second marriage are particularly chilling. Berryman and Ann Levine, whom he described as "a harmless and good woman, rather too young," quarreled often, and Berryman hit her in the face on at least two occasions. By the time their son, Paul, was barely two years old they were divorced. Mariani's clipped summary takes Berryman's part: "Ann would get the furniture and the car. Berryman would get to pay Ann's lawyer."

The final chapters of *Dream Song* are painful and monotonous to read, as Berryman drifts blearily from bar to bar, from clinic to clinic. Not until 1969 did he admit that he was an alcoholic, after being transferred to the Hazelden Clinic, where he was identified, by the admitting doctor, as "a well-developed, poorly nourished bearded male." Leaving Hazelden, his newly won sobriety lasted twelve days.

"When one thinks reluctantly over the

Slum Corner

Would you buy used blood from this man?
Not likely. Nevertheless, he reminds you,
as the year closes and thoughts turn charitable,
of the past you must always have with you.
You may hear the rattle in the cough
still distinctive, and if you manage to overlook
the slung black plastic trash bags everywhere,
the Problem of the Female Vagrant
can seem to reappear. All the doddering
throwbacks, atavistic remnants multiplying,
as always, in dim passageways
like roaches, caught in the scattered commerce
of the streets—these are nothing new.
The winter sun is setting on an empire
while a cripple sweeps debris into the alley.
Roads climb hills to ever-retreating suburbs.
Turn on your radio. What time is it?
Are there no prisons, no workhouses?

Don Bogen

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lives of the writers with whom one is familiar," Berryman remarked in 1951, "they seem a chain of disasters and maladies." What redeemed the cruelty and the disintegration of his own life, Berryman assured himself, was the poetry. But a thread of insensitivity runs through the poems as well. His interest in the extramarital affair commemorated in *Sonnets to Chris* (1947, published as *Berryman's Sonnets* in 1966) cooled early, but to give the sonnet sequence the requisite twists he purposefully prolonged and complicated the relationship. Although he despised Ann Bradstreet's poetry ("all this bald/abstract didactic rime I read appalled"), it was her body, not her words, that he appropriated for his seduction fantasy *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1953). The centerpiece of the poem is a childbirth scene written with Joycean gusto and lack of punctuation ("everything down / hardens I press with horrible joy down / my back cracks like a wrist / shame I am voiding oh behind it is too late . . ."). Berryman had researched the scene by interviewing all the mothers he knew, including his own. Meanwhile Berryman's own wife, Eileen, was undergoing an operation to facilitate pregnancy. Berryman, always ambivalent about fatherhood and seemingly unable to deal with actual childbirth, told his friends she'd had a hysterectomy.

By the time he began writing his loosely autobiographical *Dream Songs* (1965, 1969), redemption by art no longer seemed so certain to Berryman. He announced that he was "down on Rilke and the hieratic boys just now"—especially Yeats—for not mixing with real men and women. Whitman became his model, and, in his last poems, a woman poet whose words he did not despise: Emily Dickinson. But he was coming to seem increasingly unreal to himself—such are the effects of prolonged alcohol abuse—finding himself "less impressed than I used to be by the universal notion of a continuity of individual personality." The *Dream Songs* have moments of jaunty brilliance and piercing clarity, especially in the many elegies for Berryman's contemporaries. "I'm cross with god who has wrecked this generation," he wrote in one song. And in another:

> This world is gradually becoming a place
> where I do not care to be any more. Can
> Delmore die?
> . . .
>
> In the brightness of his promise,
>
> unstained, I saw him thro' the mist of the
> actual
> blazing with insight, warm with gossip
> thro' all our Harvard years
> when both of us were just becoming
> known
> I got him out of a police-station once, in
> Washington, the world is *tref*
> and grief too astray for tears.
>
> I imagine you have heard the terrible
> news,
> that Delmore Schwartz is dead, miserably
> & alone,
> in New York: he sang me a song
> 'I am the Brooklyn poet Delmore Schwartz
> Harms & the child I sing, two parents'
> torts'
> when he was young & gift-strong.

Here the verbal play on different registers—"*tref*" and "grief," the modification in the penultimate line of Virgil's "Arme virumque cano," the vaguely Homeric "gift-strong"—all amplify the poem's pathos. A child's uncomprehending sense of abandonment ("Can Delmore die?") is filtered through a poetics of extraordinary sophistication.

Still, too often the *Dream Songs* sound like a drunk who has stayed too long at the party, and stopped being funny.

> Under the table, no. That last was
> stunning,
> that flagon had breasts. Some men grow
> down cursed.
> Why drink so, two days running?
> two months, O seasons, years, two
> decades running?
> I answer (smiles) my question on the cuff:
> Man, I been thirsty.

In many passages it's hard to separate the spirits from the inspiration.

The *Dream Songs* as a whole still command a knee-jerk respect from scholars (including Mariani), as though all that machinery and shifting syntax must be doing some useful work. But Berryman wrote some of his best poetry during the last years of his life, when he seemed willing, finally, to drop his disguises, letting the circus animals go home. Some of these poems seem almost posthumous in their disillusioned gravity, like the Yeatsian "He Resigns" of summer 1970:

> Age, and the deaths, and the ghosts.
> Her having gone away
> in spirit from me. Hosts
> of regrets come & find me empty.
>
> I don't feel this will change.
> I don't want any thing
> or person, familiar or strange.
> I don't think I will sing
>
> any more just now;
> ever. I must start
> to sit with a blind brow
> above an empty heart.

Here the awkwardnesses of rhythm, in the fourth line and the ninth, carry an emotional freight, an earned effort at plainness.

The undertow of his father's death tugs at many of Berryman's late poems, as though some reconciliation were at hand. He remembers a visit, two decades earlier, with R. P. Blackmur and his wife on the Maine coast, reading late: "All I had to do was strip & get into my bed . . . and wake to a hot breakfast." But another vision of turning in intrudes:

> Off the coast was an island, P'tit Manaan,
> the bluff from Richard's lawn was almost
> sheer.
> A chill at four o'clock.
> It only takes a few minutes to make a man.
> A concentration upon now & here.
> Suddenly, unlike Bach,
>
> & horribly, unlike Bach, it occurred to me
> that *one* night, instead of warm pajamas,
> I'd take off all my clothes
> & cross the damp cold lawn & down the
> bluff
> into the terrible water & walk forever
> under it out toward the island.

Mariani catches the boozy rhythm of Berryman's life better than John Haffenden's earlier biography. He has interviewed a lot of Berryman's drinking partners, many of them well-known poets, and their anecdotes add to one's sense of the waste of this life. If *Dream Song* lacks the intensity of commitment in Mariani's earlier biography of William Carlos Williams, it may be because Berryman's life doesn't have the consistent shape and the ongoing ambition of Williams's life. Or perhaps, as a self-consciously American poet with Jersey roots, Mariani felt a closer kinship with Williams than with the Anglified and donnish Berryman. (Biography is always, to some degree, autobiography—thus Berryman, in his brilliant and hastily written biography of Stephen Crane could write profoundly of Crane's early loss of a father.)

Like Haffenden, Mariani takes the death of Berryman's father as the key to the desperation of his life. But that's about as far as Mariani goes in interpreting his subject. He takes far fewer risks than Haffenden in trying to explain Berryman's conduct toward women and men, his addictions and afflictions. Indeed, much of *Dream Song* is held together with no glue stronger than chronology, with every few pages a birthday and a New Year's. It is as though Mariani had so much material to pack in that he had little room left to tell us what it all adds up to. The book is 500 pages long and an earlier draft, according to Mariani, was twice the length. Perhaps the interpretation was lost on the cutting floor.

Another casualty, apparently, is explanatory notes of any kind. Most of the quoted material comes from a single archive, Mariani assures us, but the reader is often at a loss to know whether a given passage is from a diary, a letter, a memoir, a poem, or even a short story—al

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significantly different kinds of evidence. Mariani remarks that one of Berryman's early apartments was "a low dark long damp room," but the unidentified quote comes from Berryman's extraordinary story "The Imaginary Jew," and not, as one might think, from a letter or journal.

In his will, Berryman expressed "the wish that there may never be a biography" of him, and that all his "journals & diaries & all such notes [be] destroyed at once unread." There are now two full-length biographies, and a third, by Charles Thornbury, is in the works. One wonders whether this life is of such consuming interest to deserve such scrutiny. We are in Mariani's debt for tracking down even more testimony about what a mess Berryman's private life was. Now we need someone to synthesize and interpret, to separate the telling detail from the dead fact. In his attack on "monumental history," Nietzsche remarked that "we must know the right time to forget as well as the right time to remember." The prospect of yet another huge biography of John Berryman almost makes one wish that his will had been obeyed.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches literature at Mount Holyoke College and is completing a study of Stephen Crane.

Machine Dreams

BY BENEDICT ANDERSON

Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance by Michael Adas

(Cornell University Press, 430 pp., $29.95)

In 1820, not long after the guns of the Holy Alliance had restored the unlearning, unforgetting Bourbons to the throne of his native France, a certain G. Mollien published an account of his recent travels in the interior of western Africa. He told his readers that when he fired his double-barreled gun, the Bahene people cried out in astonishment, "We are only beasts." Since there is no reason to suspect Mollien or the Bahene of fluency in each other's languages, we can be confident that this unintentionally comic apostrophe was made up.

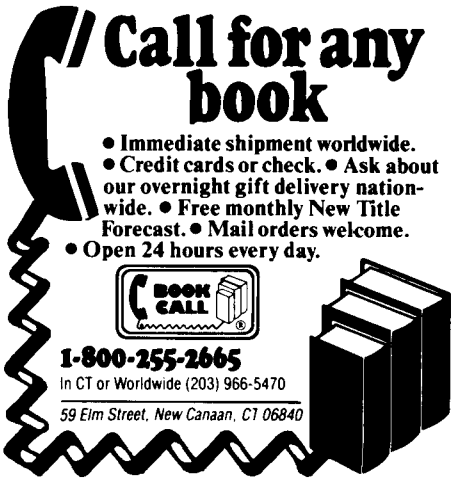
In 1817 the crusty utilitarian James Mill published a six-volume *History of British India* that had, according to Michael Adas, a "decisive influence on nineteenth-century European attitudes towards India." Mill had never been to India (this, he claimed, guaranteed his objectivity), knew practically no Indians, and was conversant with no Indian languages. Still, notes Adas, he was confident that the Indians were

> dirty, dishonest, lacking in muscular development, and . . . highly sensuous. According to his vision of India, Brahmans sat on rocks chanting meaningless mantras, and Indian princes played chess and hunted tigers while cities fell into ruin, bandits marauded the countryside, and the peasants starved.

Claiming further that "invention seems wholly torpid among them," Mill boasted that the superiority of Europeans' understanding of the natural world could readily be demonstrated by the "sight of their machines."

Adas's book is a treasure trove of such fantasies. They are often diverting in themselves, but increasingly dangerous as the expansion of industrial imperialism replaced the tall tales of traders and missionaries with the dreams of policymakers and administrators. It is Adas's argument, based on a formidably thorough acquaintance with the popular, "scientific," and bureaucratic literature of British and French (not, alas, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, or Russian) imperialism, that the general features of these chimeras changed substantially over the past four centuries as the bases for self-congratulation shifted, and military-economic power increased.

In the early days, when monarchic, aristocratic, Catholic Spain and Portugal were dominant, the image of superiority was fundamentally a religious one—though Spanish *tercios* on land and Portuguese galleons at sea were the best military machines of the sixteenth century. Hence the astonishing conversions from Latin America across to the Philippines and Japan. With the rise of the commercial, Protestant, incipiently bourgeois powers of northwest Europe in the seventeenth century, accompanied by revolutionary discoveries in physics, astronomy, biology, and chemistry, the accent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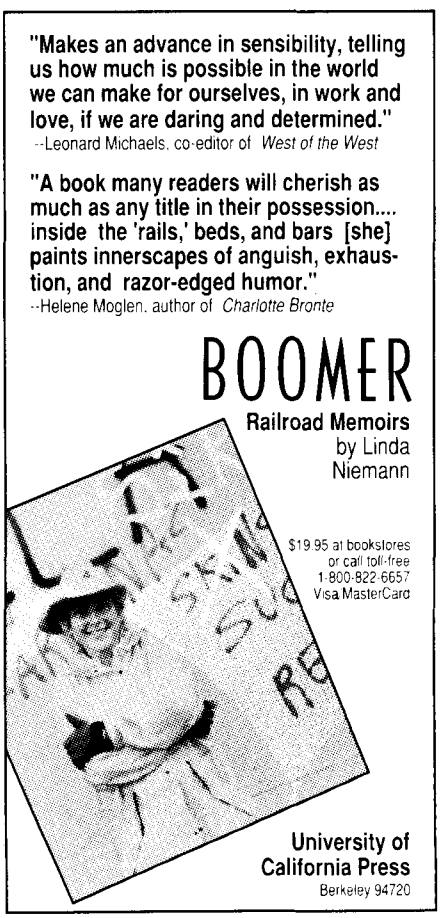
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shifted, according to Adas, to possession of a more secular truth: knowledge of the natural world in a scientific sense.

This change, which came to fruition in the Enlightened century, naturally led to a more differentiated view of people and civilizations outside western Europe. Above all China, source of gunpowder and print, was viewed as sharing significant elements of European superiority. The really fantastical development of "machine dreams," however, came with the Industrial Revolution, which deployed the scientific discoveries of the past for a vast array of technological novelties. Some of these, especially those with military applications, rapidly helped the more advanced European powers to replace Oriental and African "despotisms" with colonial despotisms of their own. These new autocracies—developed in an age during which republicanism, nationalism, liberalism, popular democracy, and (later) socialism were making visible advances in western Europe itself—required their own justification, and a justification that, so far as possible, excluded the possibility of "conversion" of the conquered.

The answer, Adas believes, was racism proper, which claimed scientific grounds for supposing that Orientals and Africans were constitutionally incapable of science. Describing the shift from benign eighteenth-century to malign nineteenth-century thinking, he notes that "though measurements of arm length or genital size [of non-Europeans] continued to be made, the skull [now] became the focus of investigation." Craniometry and phrenology, science fictions of metropolitan savants, were picked up by enthusiastic amateurs in the peripheries. (In the American periphery, for example, the Philadelphia physician Samuel Morton won wide popularity with the publication of his massive *Crania Americana*, which argued, inter alia, that skull measurements of Hindus proved that they were "prone to fantastic religions.")

Adas is careful to show that while phrenology had enormous influence on public thinking, at elite and popular levels, it also drew strong criticism on "scientific" and ethical grounds. At the same time, he skillfully highlights phrenology as an extreme form of the general self-congratulation derived from industrialism—of the sense of rapid mastery of the natural world on the basis of its own objective laws.

But there is an important fantasy link between racism and imperialism on the one hand, and science and technology on the other, that Adas tends to overlook: the political imagination. Take Monsieur Mollien, for example: we can be pretty sure that he could not himself manufacture the double-barreled shotgun that he brandished before the Bahene, and that he probably could not have expounded the scientific principles behind its operation. Millions of other "Europeans" (women as well as men) traveled on steamships and locomotives without the faintest idea of their construction. This ignorance was particularly characteristic of the European ruling classes, whose education only rarely touched on technological matters.

The interesting question, therefore, is what permitted the colonial civil servant, facing the intricacies of the locomotive engine with the same incomprehension as his native coachman, to imagine himself to be "scientific." It seems obvious that the trick could only be accomplished by identifying himself, by some imagined extension, with persons who were not ignorant, and who could build the monstrous engine.

One would have thought that the obvious imagined community in each case would have been the political unit to which he or she belonged: France, Britain, Spain, and so on. (The logic would be that of the American journalist who writes that "we" won a dozen Nobel Prizes last year.) Britain's industrial and technological dominance until the 1880s makes it an especially interesting case—that is, if "scientific superiority" was not, in fact, attributed to the peculiarities of British character and civilization. But here Adas is of little help, unfortunately, for throughout the book he unself-consciously describes the people and the thinking he is studying as "European," even in epochs where this usage is obviously anachronistic. (It is an important question when and where "European" came to be imagined.) Thinkers, publicists, travelers, merchants, and missionaries, whatever they thought of themselves as being, appear either as "Europeans" or as "Westerners," without the reader getting any clear idea of where Europe or the West begin and end.

Here, too, Adas's concentration on Britain and France, quite understandable in view of the enormous tasks confronting him, is somewhat frustrating. Portugal and Holland, for example, were both "Western" and backward in the nineteenth century, and both held vast overseas empires. In that epoch, neither contributed anything of importance to scientific advancement: Holland did not get a railroad system until the 1870s, and the local term for machinist, *engelsman* (Englishman), shows that the system was a British import. Did Dutchmen measure their "superiority" in Asia and Africa by machine-measured standards? If they did, by whose machines? Did their very backwardness require them—if they were to congratulate themselves scientifically—to identify themselves, via an imagined "Europe," with advanced Britain and France? Or did "European" really get invented not in Europe itself, but in the empires, where it politely substituted itself, after the fact, for "white"?

In the last section of his work, Adas considers the impact—on "European" thinking—of the Great War in Europe between 1914 and 1918. He argues that the colossal slaughter of Europeans by means of their own industrial armaments fatally undermined the old confident linking of progress, machines, science, and European superiority. Of the great powers, only the United States—entering the war late, suffering little, and later, dominating the postwar planet economically and militarily for two generations—fully inherited the tradition. Hence the self-congratulatory social science doctrines of development made briefly popular in the 1950s and 1960s by such savants as Walt Rostow, Daniel Lerner, and Marion Levy.

The case is powerfully made—perhaps too powerfully to be wholly convincing. It is noticeable that here Adas brings on stage such big, pessimistic actors as Freud, Valéry, and Conrad, whereas no comparable imaginative geniuses of the previous century (say, Tolstoy, Melville, Balzac) are given much space. In the industrial West the pace of technological invention, including military invention, continued to accelerate after the Great War, and in less than a generation Europe was plunged again into still more highly mechanized butcheries.

Probably of more profound importance, over the longer haul, was the stunning collapse, between 1911 and 1918, of almost all the great imperial monarchies—Ch'ing, Hohenzollern, Romanov, Ottoman, Hapsburg—and the emergence of the League of Nations from the rubble. For the rise of the League meant the ideological triumph on a world scale of the splendidly non-scientific principles of nationalism, national sovereignty, and the (at least formally) equal status of national communities. So triumphant, in fact, that within fifty years the empires even of the winners and the neutrals of the Great War disintegrated with astonishingly little bloodshed.

A central factor in this world historical change was the increasingly rapid pace at which non-Europeans of different kinds acquired Europe's technological and industrial skills. In the remarkable case of Japan, which escaped colonization, the

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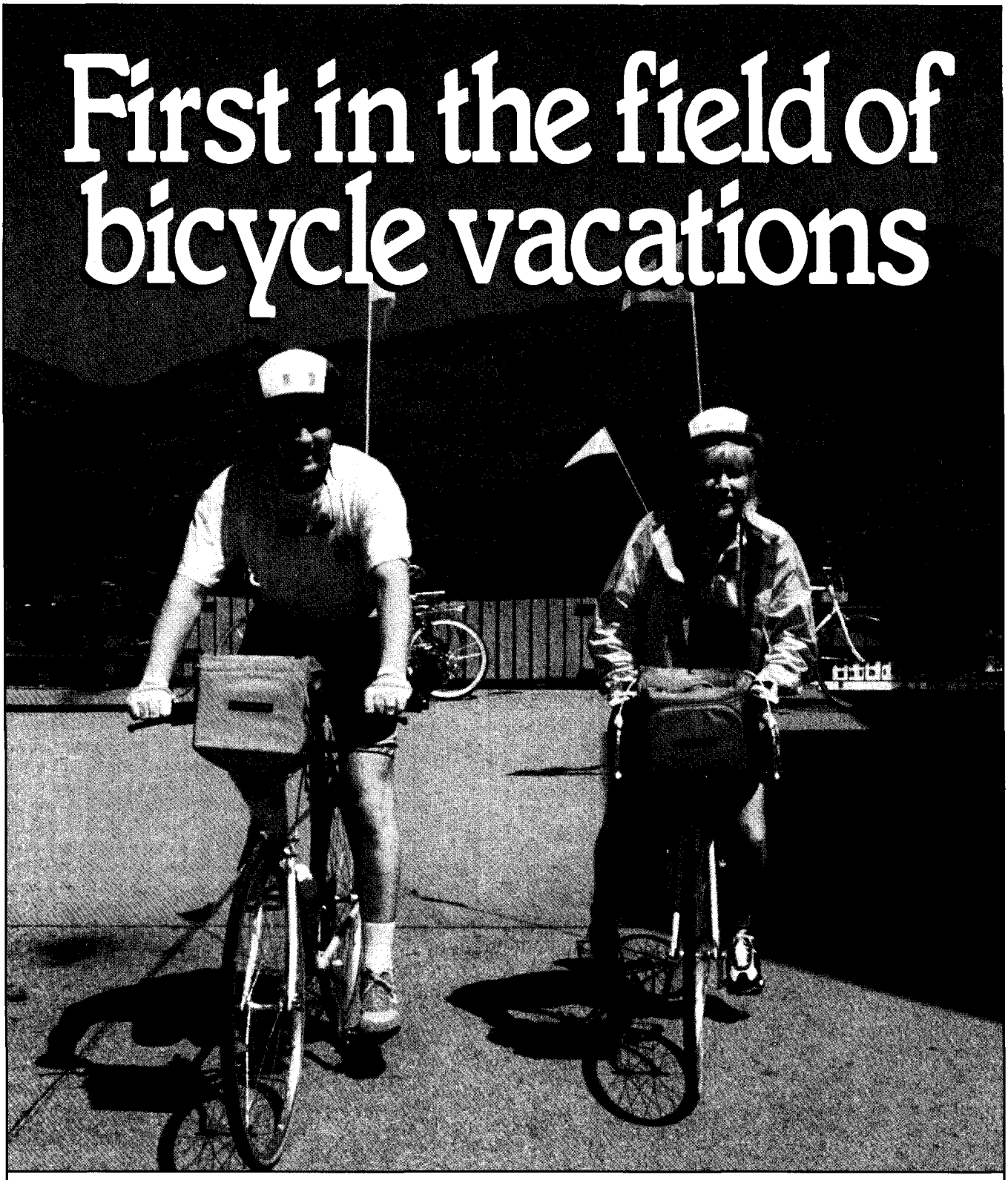

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acquisition was achieved by conscious imitation. In the great empires, the restless energy of capitalism (which Adas curiously ignores), combined with the paucity of metropolitan personnel, willy-nilly created growing armies of native machinists, chemists, engineers, shipbuilders, surveyors, doctors, railwaymen, bus drivers, and so forth. This social transformation, linked with the spread of vernacular print-capitalism, made imperial Europe's machine dreams available to newly imagined collectivities—Egyptians, Indonesians, Ghanaians, and so many others.

The engines of empire and capitalism, moreover, were slowly undermining, from early on, the racially imagined metropolitan centers. In the Americas, especially in the United States, the slave trade produced industrialized societies more profoundly heterogeneous, more violently hierarchical, than anything across the Atlantic. (One notes that the United States was the second to last substantial state to abolish slavery, and that legal desegregation was formally abolished a mere thirty-five years ago.) Later, the deepening of industrialism and the collapse of empire drew into England, France, Holland, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal huge numbers of Third World resettlers, whose children feel themselves, however uneasily, to be citizens of these "European" metropoles. In a comparable way, the vast Latin and Asian immigrations into the United States over the last three decades are already changing, and will soon change much more, the way America is imagined, by its own inhabitants, as well as by outside observers.

A nice irony, which Adas does not mention, but which he would certainly enjoy, is that it is increasingly in industrially triumphant Japan that his "machines as the measure of men" sustains its vogue. For when senior political leaders in Tokyo "explain" America's current economic difficulties by contemptuous references to its black and brown populations, while congratulating themselves on the homogeneous intelligence of Japanese society, they are reviving the imperial nineteenth-century fantasies of Europe. At the same time other Japanese leaders, complaining of acute labor shortages in the homeland, are arguing for substantially increased imports of Southeast Asian *Gastarbeiter*. Marx would be amused.

BENEDICT ANDERSON teaches at Cornell and is the author of *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso).

Tax Americana

BY ROBERT KUTTNER

A Law Unto Itself: Power, Politics, and the IRS by David Burnham

(Random House, 420 pp., $22.50)

The Internal Revenue Service, as David Burnham reminds us, is "the largest, most computerized, and least-examined law enforcement agency in America." Liberty-loving Americans have mightily resisted the creation of a national police force, national data bank, or even a national identity card. Though our Social Security number is often our driver's license number, old Social Security cards still read, anachronistically, "not to be used for identification"—a legacy of the New Deal-era fear of government record-keeping on citizens. We have taken great pains to make sure that census data are not used for police purposes, and we have carefully restrained what even the CIA can do within the United States. We have built on the original constitutional doctrine of checks and balances to fragment state power and to limit its reach. But the IRS stands out as a remarkable exception, perhaps because it is not thought of as a police agency. Though its main mission is to collect the taxes, it has gradually assumed the power to be simultaneously investigator, policeman, prosecutor, judge, and jury when it comes to determining whether a citizen has accurately tithed himself.

Burnham's title has it just right: the IRS is a law unto itself. Specifically, if the IRS suspects that a taxpayer is chiseling, it can order him to produce intimate financial records without getting a search warrant. It does not need to demonstrate reasonable cause to any independent authority, and it thus enjoys wide exemption from the Fourth Amendment rules on searches and seizures. If IRS agents think (rightly or wrongly) that there is a danger that you are hiding money, they can get a "jeopardy assessment"—again without permission of the courts—to swoop in and seize bank accounts, stocks, or other personal assets, or they can slap a tax lien on your house.

Like other police agencies, the IRS has occasionally resorted to ingenious sting operations, but unlike other police agencies, it doesn't require anybody's permission. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported, horror of horrors, a case in which the IRS set up a man's "accountant" as an informer against him. By analogy, if any law enforcement agency tried to use a citizen's lawyer in an entrapment, it would violate the most elementary principles of the common law as well as the Constitution. Yet thanks to the pretense that the IRS's business is tax collection and not law enforcement, egregious loopholes find their way into its operating procedures. In order to stay within civil law, where its reach is absolute, the IRS levies administrative penalties against about 23 million taxpayers yearly; it files only a few thousand criminal cases, which subject it directly to the adjudication of courts.

The IRS also enjoys the arbitrary power to resort to all manner of passive snooping. The advent of the computer has made this systematic spying on individuals far easier and potentially more abusive. As Burnham shows, the IRS not only collects millions of returns from taxpayers; it collects over a billion "third-party" returns from banks, brokerage houses, employers, and other people who pay wages, dividends, or miscellaneous income to taxpayers. With computer-matching, the IRS can determine who is cheating—and gain an intimate glimpse into people's lives.

Indeed, for more than a decade, the IRS has sought to piggyback onto the ever increasing store of private-sector data bases, which keep track of everything from credit ratings to buying habits. The IRS rents the data base of the local telephone directory. If the IRS had routine access to, say, American Express and MasterCard computerized records, and the records of list brokers and marketing surveys indicating who had purchased VCRs, yachts, airline tickets, BMWs, the IRS could instantly determine whose lifestyle was out of sync with his reported income. This fantasy of one giant national data bank is a revenue agent's dream—and a citizen's nightmare. To their credit, the big list brokers have refused to sell data to the IRS lest their private customer base dry up. Still, though this project has been slowed, its forward momentum is as re-

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lentless as the technology itself.

The power to tax, as Justice John Marshall said, is the power to destroy. And Burnham leaves no doubt that the destructive potential of the IRS has increased massively in recent years. However, there are three conceptually distinct questions conflated in Burnham's brilliantly indignant report. First, s the unique concentrated power of the RS anti-democratic per se? Second, how nuch is this power actually abused in practice? Third, how are we to reconcile he desire to limit the IRS's arbitrary police power with the reality of fairly widespread tax evasion and the imperative of collecting legally owed taxes? After all, he more that evasion is tolerated, the higher tax rates have to be raised on honest taxpayers to make up the difference.

Burnham is one of America's virtuoso investigative journalists. As a junior police reporter at *The New York Times* he won the confidence of detective Frank Serpico and generated a revolutionary shake-up of a corrupt New York Police Department. It was Burnham whom Karen Silkwood was en route to meet when she was mysteriously killed in an accident. In late middle-age, as a freelance reporter, Burnham is still full of energy and indignation. But he is not a political scientist or a policy analyst. So t's no surprise that his book is best at answering the second question: Just how much abuse really exists?

This turns out to be difficult to calculate definitively, for an anecdote is finally an anecdote, and doesn't necessarily imply a pattern. But Burnham has ferreted out, with his usual diligence, enough hair-raising anecdotes to suggest that wider patterns of abuse are likely at work. Nobody who reads this book can ever be complacent about the IRS again. The abuses fall into several categories. One category, which the more paranoid of us have always suspected, belongs under the heading of spiteful retaliation. A taxpayer who has the effrontery to argue with the IRS, or object to its reach, sometimes finds that the empire strikes back with mighty vengeance.

Burnham recounts several tales of poor schnooks subjected to retaliatory audits, or otherwise mashed by the IRS steamroller. Many of these cases are based on court records, so they are sufficiently well documented to have impressed a judge to admonish the IRS and pay damages to the taxpayer. A Buffalo citizen who had written a letter to the local paper criticizing the IRS was the target of an elaborate stakeout after records revealed that he had filed no tax returns: the citizen turned out to be a teenager living with his mother. Even worse, Burnham turns up several cases where IRS agents themselves were on the take. He also finds instances of IRS agents harassing taxpayers for their political views; on one occasion a fundamentalist revenue agent resisted granting tax-exempt status to an organization that taught the theory of evolution. In that case, a federal judge declared that the agent's behavior was more appropriate to a totalitarian state—yet the IRS let the agent off with a reassignment.

This leads to the question of the deployment of resources. Why does the IRS apparently spend so much energy going after relatively penny-ante chiseling and so little on big-ticket tax evaders, where much more money is to be had? Evidently, there are two answers. The first is that it is far easier to nail common tax evasion than highly complex corporate evasion. A corporate return typically contains thousands of pages, and the IRS often has the manpower to assign only a few agents to, say, Gulf Oil. The second is that Congress virtually conspires in major-league tax evasion. Individual congressmen no longer telephone IRS commissioners to fix tax cases for favorite constituents, as they did in the 1940s. Today they simply write new laws at the behest of corporate constituents, or shield wealthy taxpayers wholesale. This produces a certain cynicism on the part of revenue agents about the worth of taking on behemoth malefactors.

Burnham also demonstrates a previously unreported pattern of political use of the IRS to gain information about and to embarrass political opponents. When crackdowns on radical groups were in fashion, via COINTELPRO and other disinformation campaigns, the IRS was part of the government team. The charge of political abuse of the IRS, it's worth remembering, was one of the impeachment counts against Richard Nixon. He attempted to use IRS data to spy on and to harass political enemies. But, without at all exculpating Nixon, Burnham convincingly demonstrates that presidents have availed themselves of the IRS data bank since the 1920s.

Burnham got Vernon "Mike" Acree, the longtime head of the IRS inspection division, to admit that his office regularly provided the White House with sensitive information from taxpayer files, regardless of president or party. President Hoover and his treasury secretary, Andrew Mellon, sicced the IRS on his political enemies. FDR's treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau, then turned the IRS loose on citizen Mellon. Truman, Eisen

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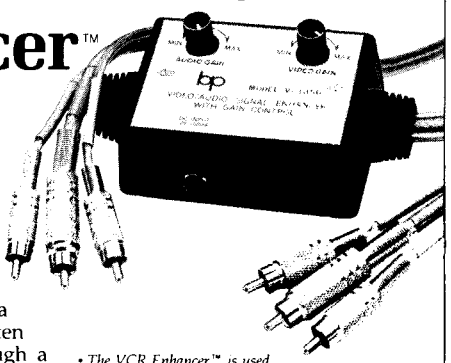

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hower, Kennedy, and Johnson, as well as Nixon, all used the IRS for selective political ends. This, presumably, has stopped.

A seemingly less harmful yet still serious problem is the IRS's high error rate. As the tax code gets more complex, revenue agents make more mistakes. You can call the IRS taxpayer information number, receive misinformation (as much as a third of the time, according to surveys), and if you use this information in miscalculating your taxes, the fact that an IRS employee told you to is no defense. (You have to get it in writing.) According to the General Accounting Office, in more than a third of taxpayer audits sampled, the IRS itself assessed an incorrect tax because of technical errors or arithmetic mistakes.

By the end of Burnham's book, his view—which seems a bit overheated at the beginning—is largely convincing. One still wonders whether the corruption and the malice are quite as pervasive as Burnham thinks. Most of what the IRS does is relatively routine. Yet even a small percentage of abuses in an agency this powerful is intolerable. Investigating an outfit like the 123,000-person IRS is daunting. Agents protect each other, many critics turn out to be cranks, the story sprawls across archives, court records, law review articles, personal allegations, and has many dry holes. But Burnham has managed to find the nuggets and fuse them into a coherent, if not always well-organized, whole.

The book's main weakness reflects Burnham's main strength. He attacks his subject as a corruption story writ large (which it surely is). But he's far less effective in addressing it as a public policy conundrum (which it also is). On the first question—Is the IRS too powerful?—Burnham implies that the story speaks for itself. Any accumulation of arbitrary police power this potent cannot be good for a democratic society. But that may be too simple an answer. On the policy dilemma of how to collect the taxes efficiently without turning the IRS into the KGB, Burnham disappoints.

What, exactly, would he do if he ran the IRS? The book's last sentence calls for "a massive infusion of new blood," which the IRS could probably use. But the problem clearly transcends personnel. Burnham offers revealing material on just how difficult it is to reconcile the goal of efficient enforcement with the goal of keeping a behemoth within democratic control. Tough congressional oversight, one source of accountability, seldom occurs because the IRS is perfectly capable of playing dirty with its congressional critics, too. The downfall in the sixties of Senator Edward Long of Missouri, a quasi-populist crusader against IRS snooping (and a close ally of the Teamsters), began with an IRS leak to a reporter. Burnham also speculates that Congress doesn't want to tamper with the IRS because it fears revenue losses.

Miraculously, largely due to the efforts of Arkansas Senator David Pryor, a man who presumably has a meticulous accountant, Congress in 1988 did pass a watered down "Taxpayers' Bill of Rights," which sets up an ombudsman and increases IRS administrative due process. Still, if the IRS is to become ever more heavily computerized, then we need to go much further, to create taxpayer rights and inject more due process into even the most routine audit, as well as making sure that the Service deploys its resources more efficiently to go after genuine tax cheats without operating on the presumption that every citizen is a tax evader.

There remains, however, the paradox that Burnham never quite addresses squarely: the more some citizens get away with tax evasion, the more other taxpayers must make up the lost revenue. Therefore it's probably in the public interest to give the IRS even more resources to perform the odious computer matches and other enforcement techniques. Yet as these awesome and potentially abusive powers increase, they must be offset with additional safeguards. These might include an independent authority to watch the watchers, enforceable guarantees of confidentiality, as well as much stiffer statutory penalties for revenue agents who abuse their power.

If any government agency in a democracy must be above suspicion, it is the tax collector. Yet taxes are, as Justice Holmes said, what we pay for civilized society, and taxes must be collected. It is a pity that Burnham did not turn his astute intellect to this conundrum, for it is real, and worth pursuing. Railing against IRS abuses—however well documented and compelling that complaint is—tells only half the story. •

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when he suggests that what men want from pornographic movies is "the image of another man enjoying himself visibly, which most men never get to see." Whether or not this theory is correct, it raises another issue, curiosity. Curiosity is the desire to learn, the most natural and human and—yes—the most moral of qualities.

I did not understand the social value of pornography until I first lived and taught in China in 1984. I once spoke to a student about freedom, and he answered, "But freedom will lead to sex." Sex, a powerful drive that leads to strong personal bonds, is a natural enemy of totalitarian regimes; China fears and severely punishes any manifestation of pornography.

Pornography is more than an instance or a symbol of free speech; it is in itself a threat to those ideologies that would destroy human freedom and the human soul.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
Staten Island, New York

The writer is professor of linguistics at the College of Staten Island.

Opportunity knocks

To the editors:

In response to Morton Kondracke's call for a reformed foreign aid program along a De Sotoesque model ("How to Aid A.I.D.," February 26), I want to present further evidence of this model's success in producing real capitalism.

Opportunity International (Elmhurst, Illinois) has served Third World poor along the De Soto-Grameen Bank model for nineteen years with extraordinary fiscal accountability and success. In 1989 alone Opportunity International made more than $4 million in loans to micro-entrepreneurs, created 9,687 jobs, and had ninety-one percent payback on loans. Opportunity International creates jobs for $500 or less and recycles its loans every two years. Eighty-five percent of its budget goes directly to the Third World in loans and training. In 1989 seventy-five percent of its income came from private donations and twenty-five percent from A.I.D.

Congress could well serve both the U.S. taxpayer and its foreign aid recipients by promoting micro-capitalism along the model used by Opportunity International and others.

JEAN C. GRIFFIN
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

TRB *continued from page 4*

tagious—it has infected all the principa Iran-contra players at various points. It fact, it has now struck the entire nation Is "Khashoggi" a person or a type o missile? What was all that about the cake Who was Elliott Abrams again?

And thus they've gotten away with it Right before our eyes.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

D.C. R.I.P.

CAN WASHINGTON EVER HAVE been a duller place than it is now? Maybe during Eisenhower's first term, but even then there were the consolations of the cold war, McCarthyism, Herblock's Nixon period, tail fins, etc. Lately the capital doesn't generate enough news to make page one of *The Washington Post*. The networks ignore us completely, except for stories about Mayor Marion Barry, which don't really count. And they're right to do so. It's positively Canadian around here. The legislative branch is stalled on everything. No piece of major legislation has been passed since tax reform in 1986. The Democrats continue to dither over various plans to break the eternal budgetary stalemate; most days there's little indication of whether Congress is even in session. George Bush is less and less willing to take the slightest risk with his stratospheric popularity. Every morning he gets up, shaves, consults his pollster Bob Teeter, and goes into hiding. This was confirmed by the NBC news special "A Day in the Life of the White House," in which Tom Brokaw observed the President, First Lady, and dog Millie amiably performing the ceremonial duties of a royal family—saluting war heroes and football stars, visiting a retirement home, playing with grandchildren, and so forth. The high point of the program was watching Bush decide which country and western tape to play.

JOURNALISTS ARE FEELING PARticularly bereft by this state of affairs. The more resourceful among them have taken to writing D.C. R.I.P. stories, which attempt to analyze the capital's newfound irrelevance and tedium. David Broder did one of these jobs a few weeks ago, which we reported by putting the proposition that Washington is now merely a bystander to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Clark Clifford, David Brinkley, and other old-timers who are themselves of declining relevancy. Needless to say, they all agreed with the hypothesis. Broder noted: "Those who have fled important Washington jobs testify that they have escaped, not just tedium but a sense of irrelevancy that drove them almost to despair." I know the feeling, but I don't think it's a departure from the norm. The Broder fallacy is that Washington was at some point in history a vibrant, pulsating cosmopolis. This shibboleth is a product of the Reagan years, when Washington became so imbued with a sense of its own importance that it actually began to seem exciting to those caught up in the momentum. Partisan strife filled the halls of Congress. Conservative intellectuals like Irving Kristol moved in and took jobs at think tanks proliferating faster than chain restaurants. Washington was going to replace New York as the hub of the idea industry. This sleepy Southern town suddenly appeared stimulating and sophisticated. Our *fata morgana* was, however, mostly hype. The city's permanent condition is to be bland, hermetic, parochial. The ennui felt by Broder's subjects is, alas, perfectly normal. Like most planned cities, Washington suffers from a chronic shortage of character and variety. I've always thought of it as a comfortable hotel, or perhaps an ice cream parlor that serves only vanilla. It is driven by an artificial heart—the federal government—that ticks on with a dull, expensive regularity but can't pump any real, red blood into the city's arteries. "That old brick and marble shell," Edmund Wilson called it when he came here to write about the New Deal in 1934. Washington, he wrote, "turns out, when one has stayed there any length of time, to have little personality of its own and to come to taste rather flat." Lately it's returned to its *status quo ante*, that of an uneventful, unlovely cultural backwater.

MY FAVORITE WASHINGTON RITual is the annual flourish of Japanese cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin. My least favorite is Representative Dan Rostenkowski's bid for nobility, which usually hits around the same time, in late March or early April. This year Rosty has proposed a "big fix" for the budget deficit, a plan under which Bush agrees to raise taxes and the Democrats agree to take the blame for it. Whenever he makes one of these statesmanlike gestures, there's a temptation to see Rosty as a born-again man of principle. But the venal ward-heeler from Chicago always comes back to haunt you. With timing that may be more than coincidental, *The Wall Street Journal* recently revealed that the epic fix of Rostenkowski's career is about to cost taxpayers a fortune. The favor was to a luxury housing development in Chicago called Presidential Towers, which the Ways and Mean Committee chairman helped exempt from most of the laws and regulations that would otherwise have applied to it. Rostenkowski assisted in securing a low-interest loan from the city of Chicago, an advantageous mortgage from the Federal Housing Administration, accelerated depreciation for the investors, and an exception from a rule requiring them to set aside twenty percent of the apartments for low-income tenants. These courtesies were worth something like $67 million to what became the most heavily subsidized luxury housing development in modern history. But this was more than standard pork barreling. One of the principal investors is Rostenkowski's bosom friend Dan Shannon. The relationship between the two men has been long and mutually gratifying. As manager of the congressman's blind trust, Shannon earned Rostenkowski $50,000 on a $200 investment. Now Shannon and the other Presidential Towers investors have defaulted on a $171 million government loan and are asking HUD for an additional $16 million to bail them out. Of course it's preposterous for the government to subsidize high rises for rich people. But big fix or no, I'll bet Rosty's buddies will once again get what they want.

THE NEXT TIME A MAN WITH A clipboard and pencil asks you a question, lie to him. Deceit has done wonders for democracy in Eastern Europe and Latin America, and it might give democracy a shot in the arm here as well. In 1988 General Pinochet agreed to hold an election only after seeing polls that told him that he would win one. A year later the Polish Communists followed in his goose steps by consenting to a vote when they saw Ministry of the Interior polls that showed they would win enough votes to remain in control. And most recently, Daniel Ortega fell into the same trap, having no doubt about surveys that showed him running twenty points ahead of Violeta Chamorro. "I cannot explain it, I cannot explain it," he wept the day after the election. "And I say this as a social scientist." These peoples fooled their leaders because they were rightly suspicious of those asking them the question, "Who do you like?" If we were equally wary, our own tyranny of public opinion would come crashing down too. Mike Royko once wrote a column urging voters to lie to exit pollsters so that networks couldn't declare the winners in elections before they were over. I would extend this fine suggestion to all opinion polls, marketing surveys, focus groups, Nielsen ratings, and so forth. If the trend were to catch on, the margin of error would grow to the point where all such results would become untrustworthy. The scientifically determined path of least resistance would suddenly become cloudy. Unable to discover the most popular position on a given issue, politicians would have no alternative but to follow their own beliefs. Their attack ads would backfire. George Bush would get up in the morning, shave, and find himself totally at sea. As his approval rating sank, a Democrat might voluntarily run against him in 1992. And if one won, it might pump some life into this old brick and marble shell.

JACOB WEISBERG

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